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INTRODUCTION

MANAGEMENT CONSULTING: THEMES, THEORIES AND TRAJECTORIES

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INTRODUCTION

In these two volumes we bring together many of the seminal works from leading researchers that have influenced thinking and research in relation to the activities of management consultants. We adopted a two-pronged approach to identify the contributions to be included. Firstly, we contacted leading researchers in the field and asked them to identify those publications they regarded as "essential reading" both in terms of influence but also as exemplars of a particular theme. Secondly, we conducted an extensive search using a number of electronic journal databases to identify the degree of influence of publications in terms of their citation counts. We reduced this long list to a shorter one by selecting publications that these two processes identified as having had a major influence on thinking about management consulting and also represent a particular area of work[i]. In this way we have sought to provide an authoritative and broad-based reference resource that organizes the burgeoning literature on the topic into discrete sections. This presentation of the literature allows the capture of the main themes that have provided a focus for scholarly activity over the past fifty years. The contributions cover the growth and emergence of the management consulting industry, the different disciplinary and theoretical perspectives on consulting practice and the nature of consulting, as a service and as a knowledge-based industry.

Moreover, the nature of organizational learning, the management and supply of knowledge, and the dynamics of the client-consultant relationship.

The array of themes and diversity of approaches covered by these publications is testament to the interdisciplinarity, vitality and richness of debates in the area. The contributions show that consulting is an activity that has come to represent a critical meeting point for a wide range of theoretical and empirical approaches, debates and disciplines. Therefore, the study of consulting is an ideal subject through which to learn about the contemporary applications of a number of major themes that have infused management and organization studies during the twentieth century. These include the emergence of management as an occupation, the changing character of work, changing approaches to the management and organization of firms, the professionalization of management, the rise of knowledge-intensive activities, the development of a service economy, knowledge management, the internationalization of the firm, and so forth. In gaining a deeper understanding of consulting readers will become more knowledgeable about the evolutionary changes of management but also the discourses that have shaped its institutional development over time.

Although management consulting emerged in the early part of the twentieth century, it remained a relatively small and marginal activity with little visibility for many years (Kipping and Engwall 2002; Sahlin-Anderson and Engwall 2002). Early founders of management consulting firms received attention in the business press. This was mainly in the form of newspaper and magazine articles relating to the personal activities of well-known advocates of scientific management such as Frederick Taylor, Harrington Emerson and the Gilbreths. Attention was paid to the specific individuals championing innovative practices rather than the nature and operation of the industry (Kipping and Clark 2012). Even in those cases where a firm was established and grew to become relatively large such as the Bedaux Company (Kreis 1990) the business press was more interested in the Bedaux's entrepreneurial activities and his connection with the former King Edward VIII. These individuals were of interest to the press as celebrities rather than for the consulting activities with which they were involved (Kipping and Clark 2012). Attention to their public profile was driven by their personality and personal activities rather than their role as knowledge entrepreneurs. It was not until the 1960s that journalists and, academic-practitioners associated mainly with Organizational Development (OD), began to write about the industry and the nature of the consulting process itself (see Tilles 1961; Higdon 1969; Schein 1969). This lack of public awareness about management consulting is identified by Higdon (1969: 4) in perhaps the first detailed overview of the industry. He writes that management consultants 'shroud their work under a cloak of mystery – as though they were soothsayers, or practitioners of some sort of black art ... Thus almost a conspiracy of silence pervades the management consulting profession ... They want publicity but on their own terms'. Higdon (1969) shows that broad awareness of consulting was limited and the consulting industry was happy to remain out of the glare of publicity. He portrays an industry concerned with wanting to have control over its image and ensure that the work it undertook for clients remained confidential and therefore largely unreported. However, in subsequent years both journalistic and academic interest in the industry grew rapidly. The industry is no longer the background presence it once was but has been pulled into the spotlight by sustained public scrutiny (National Audit Office 2006). This deeper exploration of the nature of consulting has paralleled the industry's explosive growth over the last forty years. Management consulting has been transformed from a peripheral occupation to one that is a popular career choice with University students becoming recognized as emblematic of the new breed of high prestige knowledge-based occupations considered central to the emergence of a post-industrial or information economy (Bell 1973; Stehr 1994; Kumar 1995). In a relatively short period of time, management consultants have come to occupy a key role in modern organizations and social systems as agents of change (Clark and Fincham 2002; Kipping and Engwall 2002). They have woven themselves into the changing fabric of organizations and thus become an almost indispensable aid to management. Management consultants are deeply involved in a wide spectrum of decisions that clients make. Such decisions can involve specialist expertise, new knowledge or the need for external legitimation. The implications of such decisions can influence the clients' corporate size, shape, strategic positioning and implementation of Information Technology (IT).

Management consultants are portrayed as exercising considerable influence over managerial thinking and action. This is because they are agents and disseminators of key ideas and techniques that have a considerable impact on the organizations that employ them and the working lives of the people who work in them (Kipping and Engwall 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). However, their influence is perhaps far more general since the consequences of their ideas and recommendations spill-over into many aspects of our lives. Management consultants work for governments and their work can have impacts on policy outcomes which can in turn influence the delivery of critical services such as education, health care and welfare support (Saint-Martin 2000; Czerniawska and May 2004). Although some people may not directly experience the work of consultants the indirect impact of their advice on citizens or employees is hard to avoid. Indeed, the indirect aspects of consultancy work may be greater than its direct consequences (Sturdy 2011). The view of consultants as a shadowy force exercising an insidious influence and power over the nature and destiny of modern organizations and society has heightened both their media profile as well as the level of research interest in the academic literature. Indeed, the use of the title *Masters of Universe* in a television programme devoted to understanding the emergence and activities of management consultants captures this sense of unbridled power (Films of Record 1999).

WHY STUDY MANAGEMENT CONSULTING?

In this section we identify the main reasons as to why academics have studied consulting before providing a brief overview of the content and structure of the two volumes. The intention is to provide readers with a sense of the historical emergence of research on consulting before outlining the themes that structure the content of each volume. Reading the next three sections in conjunction with the summaries of the contributions in the fourth section, will help readers to navigate their way through the academic landscape by having a better sense of the context and connections between the publications included.

EMERGENCE AND GROWTH OF THE INDUSTRY

One of the most frequently cited factors for studying management consulting is that the industry has been one of the more dynamic and fast growing sectors of the service economy in many Western advanced economies (Clark 1995; Keeble and Schwalbach 1995; Armbrüster 2006). At a broad level, and since the 1960s, the balance of advanced Western economies has tilted heavily from manufacturing to services. Service industries have grown in response to a growing demand for advice-based services (Kubr, 2002/1976). Moreover, manufacturing firms 'have focussed on their core activities and externalized the production of peripheral activities including a range of business services' (Roberts 2003: 130). Those economies that sought to develop knowledge specialization have been variously described as post-industrial, information societies and knowledge economies (Kumar 1995). Critical to each is the emergence of the centrality of knowledge and the proliferation of advice-based industries for making critical interventions to performance and productivity (Stehr 1990). Although not all sectors of the service economy have grown at a similar pace, business services and consulting services expanded particularly rapidly with the ratio of consultants to managers growing from one to a hundred in 1965, to one to thirteen in 1995 (McKenna 2006:8). During this period management consulting experienced an almost uninterrupted period of positive annual growth with many years in double-digits and a small number of firms reaching over 20% growth. Growth occasionally slowed but very rarely fell (Niewiem and Richter 2004). Much of this growth occurred in the 1980s with a number of business services - management consultancies, employment agencies and IT services - expanding very quickly. In the UK Keeble and Schwalbach (1995:22) reported that 'the number of UK management consultancy companies registered for VAT more than doubled (+118%) in the seven years 1985-1992'. In Europe they found that a third of the members of the European Federation of Management Consultancies Associations (FEACO) were under fifteen years old and a little over 68% were under twenty years old (ibid., 1995: 12-13). Overall, Ernst and Kieser (2002) estimate that in the region of 80% of consultancies were established between 1980 and 1997 (see also Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996: 51).

Calculations of the size of the market are problematic given the indeterminacy of the industry's boundaries. There is lack of specificity over the nature of consulting as an activity with the consequence that determining where consulting starts and ends is highly problematic. Definitions vary in the literature as to what management consulting is and what are the attributes and activities consultants embody. According to *The Oxford Compact Dictionary* the origin of the word 'consulting' comes from the Latin *consultare*, from *consulere* which means to 'take counsel' (1996:210). To consult can variably mean: '1. seek information or advice from. 2. Refer to a person for advice 3. Seek permission or approval from (a person) for a proposed action. 4. Take into account (feelings, interests, etc)' (1996:210). The dictionary also defines the term consulting as: 'giving professional advice to others working in the *same* field or subject' (1996:210) (Italics added). Barcus and Wilkinson (1986:7) define consulting as

> an independent and objective advisory service provided by qualified persons to clients in order to help them identify and analyse management problems or opportunities. Management consultants also recommend solutions or suggested actions with respect to these issues and help when requested, in the implementation. In essence, management consultants help to effect constructive change in private or public sector organisations through the sound application of substantive and process skills.

Similarly, Greiner and Metzger (1983:7) define consulting as ‘an advisory service contracted for and provided to organizations by specially trained and qualified persons who assist, in an objective and independent manner, the client organization to identify management problems, analyze such problems, recommend solutions to these problems, and help, when requested, in the implementation of solutions’. This description is also echoed in the definition used by the UK’s Management Consultancies Association (MCA) who define consultancy as: ‘the creation of value for organisations, through the application of knowledge, techniques and assets, to improve performance. This is achieved through the rendering of objective advice and/or the implementation of business solutions’ (www.mca.org.co.uk).

There are at least three key issues captured by the above definitions. The first positive attribute attached to consulting is the spatial proximity between consultants and clients. The consultants are separate or external to the client organisation and hence are assumed to adopt an independent or objective-stand towards the client’s situation. This dialectic discourse between those who are ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ the situated managerial problem becomes the first basis of differentiation which frames the consulting activity[ii]. The second is the assumption that consultants are able to detect or analyse management problems of importance for the client. The conceptual correlation made between those that are inside a managerial problem with those outside and who are able to detect deficiencies assumes not only a spatial proximity but also a *qualitative* one. Consultants are in a privileged position to help and detect existing or emerging managerial issues for the client and provide a complementary course of action. Third, and related to this, consultants are viewed as professionals in that they have access to a knowledgebase that might be unavailable or difficult to access by clients. Hence, the consultants' advice and value is partly based on clients seeking the help to address their own knowledge deficiencies and/or diffuse this knowledge into the organization. It needs to be noted that this view of management consultants is not uncontested. We present alternative conceptions of consulting later in the chapter.

Even though the focus on any consulting definition is on the 'advice' and 'helping' process, the actualisation of advice seems to be a consequent result of the type of organisational problem experienced by the client. The consultants' involvement to suggesting a course of action, that can be successfully implemented, has become subject of much debate and particularly in relation to detecting the value of consulting (Gable 1996).

The lack of consensus in defining consulting is further complicated by the emergence of large multi-service professional service firms (PSFs). These were originally based on the Big Eight then Big Five global accountancy firms, but more recently on large IT consulting and outsourcing firms (Galal, Richter and Wendlandt 2012). In 1992 just over 23% of the revenues of the top ten U.S. accounting firms were accounted for by management advisory services (McDougald and Greenwood 2012). *Accounting Today* (2010) report that this figure had now declined slightly to 22.5%. Given the range of services offered in multi-practice firms it is difficult to disentangle consulting from other advisory services offered by these firms. With this caveat in mind, between 1980 and 1999 the world-wide revenues of the industry were estimated to have grown from \$3 billion to \$60 billion (Fincham and Clark 2002). More recently, *Datamonitor* (2010) reported that in 2009 the global management and marketing consultancy market was worth \$272.3 billion and was predicted to have a compound annual growth rate of '7.1% for the five-year period 2009-2014, which is expected to drive the market to a value of $383.1 billion by the end of 2014' (p. 8 and p. 32). This report shows that North America still remains the largest market accounting for 50% of worldwide revenues followed by Europe (40%), Asia, Middle East and Africa. Despite revenues in these latter three markets being predicted to increase slightly (2.6%), the report demonstrates that consulting still remains very rooted in the markets in which it originated in the twentieth century (for historic data see Higdon 1969).

In summary, business services have grown considerably in the latter part of the Twentieth Century and management consulting has been one of the fastest occupations within this broad sector. Thus, part of the increasing curiosity into management consulting work is related to their increased economic significance and a desire to understand the broader economic shifts of which they are a part.

JOURNALISTIC AND FREELANCE AUTHORS ACCOUNTS

Recent public and academic awareness of consulting has also been propelled by the writings of journalists and free-lance authors (e.g., Ashford 1998; Micklethwait and Wooldridge 1996; O'Shea and Madigan 1997; Wooldridge 1997; Pinault 2001; Craig 2005). Such accounts have raised the industry's visibility to a level where it has on occasion been placed as the focus of media attention. A search on the Gale database[iii] between 1985 and 2011 generates a list of 5863 articles. This indicates the level of attention that journalists have shown in consultants in the last twenty-five years. The degree of interest has been fostered by their speed to print and the size of their audience. These accounts have been particularly influential in shaping the broader public's view of consultants' work and could be argued that carried a greater impact than academic-related publications.

In surveying these articles it is possible to identify a number of reoccurring themes like the high cost of consulting projects and a failure to control budgets the lack of client control. Morever, the consultants' power to introduce radical changes in a client organization, the attractiveness of consulting as a career destination and the clients' difficulty to evaluate project results. Given that many of these accounts are founded on the experience of former consultants or journalistic investigations they are engaging but also critical and cynical of the activities and impact of the consulting industry (Byrne 2002). Some authors focus on critical projects and the use of consulting in the public sector. For example, O'Harrow (2007) reports on a large consulting project involving the US Department of Homeland Security in which Booz Allen was contracted to assist with the setting up of an 'intelligence operation' programme. The article suggests that an over-reliance on consultants combined with a 'no-bid' contract led to the project costing 15 times its initial value of $2 million. What this article emphasizes as do many others, is the attractiveness of the public sector as a client sector to the global consulting and IT firms. This attractiveness is fuelled by the need to deploy large scale projects and the public sector's continuing failure to manage consultants in large-scale complex projects. The narrative developed in journalistic accounts is that the lack of self-reflection by the public sector in terms of how and why consultants are used, is supporting an uncritical and continuing use of consultants. This theme is evident in auditing reports on the use of consultants by the UK's central government and National Health Service (National Audit Office 2006, 2010; House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts 2007) which are frequently used by journalists to criticize consultants. For example, in its most recent report the National Audit Office (2010:5) concluded

> Our work demonstrates that although total spending on consultants has fallen slightly since 2006-07, there has been inconsistent progress made by departments and the reduction has not occurred within an effective control environment. We conclude that

> government is not achieving value for money from its use of consultants and interims, because it frequently lacks the information, skills and strategies to manage them effectively and therefore cannot drive delivery.

Criticism of consultants is not limited to their activities performed in the public sector. For example, in relation to the private sector in *Dangerous Company: The Consulting Powerhouses and The Companies They Save And Ruin*, James O'Shea and Charles Madigan (1997) report a series of consulting assignments that have gone so egregiously wrong that they reached the courts. There is the case of Figgie International, a Fortune 500 company, which paid consultants more than $50 million to help make it a 'world-class manufacturer'. They argue that despite the expertise of some of the most highly-regarded consultancy firms in the world, the company narrowly escaped bankruptcy as sales fell from $1.3 billion to $319 million, between 1989 and 1994. Over the same period profits declined from $63 million to losses of $166 million and the number of employees was reduced by 35%. Figgie sued its two lead consultancy firms but neither admitted any fault and the law suits were settled out of court. In another case O'Shea and Madigan (1997) report that between 1989 and 1994 the American telecommunications company AT&T spent $500 million on consultancy advice involving some of the leading firms in the industry. For example, Monitor received $127 million, McKinsey received over $96 million and Andersen Consulting billed AT&T for $87 million. O'Shea and Madigan (1997:3-4) note that 'AT&T seems as confused today as it did when the period began.'

Similarly, in *Rip Off* (2005) written by an ex-management consultant, consultants are presented as extremely selfish, being wholly driven by greed and vanity, and as having few moral scruples as they prioritize their own interests over those of their client firms. Consequently any value from a consulting assignment tends to accrue to the consultants in the form of fees. Indeed, a key theme running throughout the book is that consultants are more interested in obtaining an assignment and securing fees than making a positive contribution to clients. Whole sections of the book are devoted to describing a range of techniques employed by consultants to convince clients of their value or turning existing project into larger and more profitable ones.

This latter point is highlighted in an article published in *The Independent* (2009) titled 'Masters of Illusion'. In this article an ex-consultant recounts his personal experiences of working in the industry. A key motif in the article is the notion of 'whale-hunting – as we called the art of landing a big client' (p. XX). The analytical techniques the consultant employed resulted in a series of lines on charts that appeared to depict a big fish. They state:

> I eventually came to understand that it is possible to construct a Whale chart for just about any business anywhere. It makes no difference whether the business is inherently good or bad, well-managed or in the hands of chimpanzees. It doesn't even have to be a business – it can be a football game or a population chart. In fact, you don't even have to do the analysis. You can save 80 per cent of the effort by just borrowing data from a previous analysis. There's always going to be a skew. It isn't science; it's a party trick. (p. XX)

This technique, alongside the way consultants dressed, where they ate, and their self-confident manner added 'several points to one's perceived expertise quotient' (p. XX). This article, like many others, emphasizes the shallowness of consulting knowledge and the importance of being seen to be knowledgeable when often consultants know less than their clients. What this implies is that consulting is about creating a sense of value in order to maintain strong relationships with clients. As we will show later, this theme has dominated parts of the academic literature.

The view of consultants acting in their own interests and at the expense of their clients pervades journalistic accounts of the industry. However, this view of consulting contrasts with the more functionalist accounts that characterized the Organization Development approach to consulting. Such accounts emphasized the positive effects of using consultants and for introducing changes which can be necessary for an organisation to incorporate in order to perform better (e.g., Beckhard 1969; Schein 1969; French and Bell 1995). Nevertheless, as the examples above demonstrate, the activities of consultants raise powerful negative comments and emotions. This strong and widely-shared sense of suspicion of consultants is partly driven by their status as 'outsiders'. They seek to 'enter' clients in order to offer advice and assistance whilst having limited exposure to and responsibility for the potential outcomes. The consultants' efforts to persuade clients, whilst avoiding the implementation or accountability of outcomes produced by their actions, contributed to humours remarks and jokes. Like lawyers, consultants are portrayed negatively in many disparaging jokes. Sturdy, Clark, Fincham and Handley (2008:134) write

> One of the oldest jokes, that has been doing the rounds since the 1960s, is that: "A management consultant is someone who will borrow your watch to tell you the time (when you didn't ask to know) and then sell it to someone else (who didn't know that they wanted to buy one)". You probably have heard this before or, if not, then others like it. It seems that their services have become indispensable while we love to hate them at the same time.

The levels of ambivalence and occasionally outright hostility, directed at consultants are expressed in jokes because they capture the felt cynicism. The negative portrayal of consulting stems from concerns around their lack of accountability and client control. Moreover their lack of sensitivity to clients' interests, their tendency to impose their interests and understandings on a situation, and whether they provide services that generate value for clients.

At the heart of this literature is a paradox, if consultants are viewed as expensive and self-interested and the outcome of their work is unclear or fails, why is there an increasing number of organizations turning to them for assistance? As Fincham and Clark (2002:8) point out, this is a particularly frequent question asked in the journalistic literature since '[C]onsultancy is presented as a zero-sum game; if consultants are making money someone else must be losing it – inevitably clients'. From this critical perspective consultants do not add value to their clients. Indeed, they are the only party to benefit. The reason for their increased use is therefore their highly developed persuasive abilities in contrast to clients' passive naiveté. Clients are viewed as endemically susceptible to the glib promises of consultants. While parts of the academic literature highlight the importance of the consultants' persuasive strategies other sections stress the active and sometimes dominant role of clients. We discuss this theme and in greater detail below and particularly in relation to the role of clients in the production of consulting knowledge.

CONSULTANTS AND THE CREATION AND DISSEMINATION OF MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

More recent research has been driven by the recognition that consultants are important conduits through which knowledge, from a variety of sources, is appropriated, commodified and, sometimes transferred into, between and from client organizations, sectors and nations (Clark 1995; Clark and Fincham 2002; Kipping and Engwall 2002). There are different sources that contribute to the production and transfer of knowledge. These include: the consultants' experience from working with clients, the transfer of knowledge and practices from other firms, the application of models to generate new understandings and the implementation of methods and techniques to develop new ways of working. Ernst and Kieser (2002: 53) suggest that whatever the source, consultants 'do not transfer ordinary knowledge but they transfer knowledge of "best practices" … from the "most successful companies", store it, and use it to solve their client's problems'. In this respect, consultants are critical carriers and diffusers of innovative / fashionable management knowledge and techniques, cascading knowledge between different client arenas. This is crystallized in Abrahamson's (1996) theory of management fashion. His key idea is that management fashions are 'the product of a management-fashion-setting *process* involving particular management fashion setters – organizations and individuals who dedicate themselves to producing and disseminating management knowledge' (ibid.: 256, emphasis in the original). For Abrahamson (1996) management consultants represent one group of management knowledge disseminators. Others include management gurus, business schools and management academics and publishers (see also Suddaby and Greenwood 2001; Ernst and Kieser 2002; Jung and Kieser 2012; Clark, Bhatanacharoen and Greatbatch 2012). He argues that these different agents compete for the attention of the managerial audience, each trying to produce ideas that will be attractive to the intended audience. As the popularity of ideas and between different agents waxes and wanes so does their attractiveness to managers. Thus being perceived as offering pioneering cutting-edge ideas is essential to ensuring the continued survival. Consultants cannot afford to be viewed as being out of step with prevailing managerial preferences. Having a sense of the *zeitgeist* is critical if consultancies are to remain pre-eminent.

Whilst Abrahamson's (1996) work on management fashion has spawned a plethora of studies examining the diffusion pattern of a range of fashionable discourses within the print media (e.g., Abrahamson and Fairchild 1999; Carson, Lanier, Carson and Guidry 2000; Benders and van Veen 2001; Spell 2001; Gibson and Tesone 2001) other works have examined the knowledge production and management processes within consultancies. At a macro level there are at least two contrasting approaches which are referred to as the Organizational Development (OD) and Critical approach (Clark and Fincham 2002; Nikolova and Devinney 2012). The OD approach was the prevalent approach until the mid-1980s. It was based on a view of organizations as systems that can be logically understood, reduced to their component parts and changed using insights and techniques from the behavioural sciences. Consultants were viewed as 'professional helpers remedying illness in client organizations' (Fincham and Clark 2002:7). Like a surgeon they were depicted as drawing upon a professional knowledgebase in order to take an organizational history, identify the symptoms of the presenting problem and recommend an appropriate cure. On the basis of a comprehensive review of this literature Clark and Salaman (1996) indicate that the main preoccupation of this voluminous literature was with identifying and examining those factors that were perceived as maximizing the consultants' effectiveness whilst conducting organizational interventions. In contrast, the Critical approach focused on how consultants sustain their knowledge claims by creating impressions of value (Clark 1995; Clark and Fincham 2002; Starbuck 1992). Similar to the preoccupations of many journalists mentioned above this perspective arises from the view that consultancy knowledge is ambiguous and contested (Alvesson 1993). There is no agreement on what and how knowledge may be appropriate for a particular client problem. Furthermore, the relationship between the application of consultants' knowledge and the outcomes of their work is unclear. For these reasons Alvesson (1993:1011) argues that management consultancies are 'systems of persuasion' in that 'The ambiguities involved in work and results mean that internally as well as externally great efforts must be made in order to emphasize … that experts should be relied upon'. In these circumstances representations and symbols of knowledge become critical. As Clark and Salaman (1998:147) argue, consultants '*cannot* deploy a body of formal, authoritative theoretical professional knowledge', rather their 'authority vis-à-vis their clients – senior managers – depends on the impression of possessing authoritative knowledge'. Therefore the critical perspective focuses on the rhetorical and symbolic achievement of consulting.

At a more micro-level there have been empirical studies examining the elements, systems, methods and processes underpinning knowledge creation and transfer between consultants (for example, Hansen, Nohria and Tierney 1999; Werr and Stjenberg 2003; Werr and Styhre 2003; Fosstenløkken, Løwendahl and Rewang 2003). These studies recognize that the most valuable asset in a consultancy is the knowledge embedded in employees. They highlight that knowledge generation and distribution occurs in the form of knowledge flows. Such flows take place from senior to junior consultants and from clients to consultants. Methods of communication and distribution include electronic databases, interaction, personal networks, mentoring, team work arrangements, methodologies, cases, experiences from working with clients, and training. Hansen, Nohria and Tierney (1999) suggest that consultancies adopt either a codification (the development of ways to codify, store and reuse knowledge by using electronic documents) or personalization (knowledge is shared mainly through the result of social interaction between individuals) strategy for managing knowledge. Werr and Stjernberg (2003) highlight that methods, tools, cases and experiences present an important source of knowledge for consultants and contributes to their organizational competence. Fosstenløkken, Løwendahl and Revanget (2003) highlight the ways in which consultants generate knowledge by working with clients. In particular they propose that interacting with the 'right kind of clients', multidisciplinary consultancy teams, intra-firm discussions, explicit investments in knowledge development (e.g., formal training programs) and internal consultancy development projects, are important for a consultant's knowledge development processes. Work by Heusinkveld and Benders (2005) and Anand, Gardner and Morris (2007) identified the political and social processes within consulting firms that draw upon these different knowledge sources to support the development of new products and services. Overall, this literature has emphasized the key role that consultants play in producing and disseminating management knowledge. As such, it has identified the type of knowledge available to consultancies and how they store and commoditize it for commercial gain. In this respect consultancies are seen as emblematic firms and at the centre of the knowledge/information economy. They are knowledge entrepreneurs *par excellence.*

THE THEMES IN THE VOLUMES

We have organized the fifty-eight contributions in these two volumes into five broad sections and eight sub-sections. In what follows we review the key themes in each of the five sections before providing more detailed summaries of the individual contributions.

Part I - The Historical Emergence of Management Consulting

Volume 1 opens with those articles that explore the historical emergence of management consulting and underline key issues which run through subsequent sections of the collection. First, although the precise origins of consulting are debated and its lineage is connected either to scientific management, cost accounting or industrial engineering, there is general agreement on two issues. First, management consulting grew out of a rising demand from organizations for access to 'independent advice' and specialist 'knowledge expertise'. As McKenna (2006:13) writes consultants 'provided their clients with a cost-effective means to acquire managerial skills, techniques, and processes at a lower cost than the equivalent internal studies of the same problems'. Second, the industry's emergence and expansion is related to regulatory changes such as the Glass-Steagall Banking Act of 1933 and more recently the Sarbanes-Oxley Act (SOX) of 2002. Although nearly 70 years passed between the two Acts they both restricted different suppliers of advice (banks and accountants) from offering consulting services. As McKenna (2006:17) wrote with respect to the Glass-Steagall Banking Act 'The Banking Act and SEC prohibited rival professional groups, like lawyers, engineers, and accountants, from continuing to act as consultants, and promoted the rapid growth of independent management consulting firms during the 1930s'. In an attempt to address the perceived lack of auditor independence arising from the cross-selling of different management advisory services to a single audit client, the Sarbanes-Oxley Act made it unlawful for accounting firms to offer a range of non-audit services, including management consulting to audit clients[iv]. Despite this legislation the extent to which auditors can remain independent if they perform other services for clients continues to be debated. For example, in a speech to the Federation of European Accountants, Michel Barnier the European Commissioner for the Internal Market and Services, said

> another symptom of over-familiarity between auditors and their clients is the provision of many ancillary or non-audit services. These services generate more revenue than the audit itself for most of the large audit groups. But how can you impartially judge a company that you are also advising on its development strategy?

He indicated that the European Commission was exploring pan-European restrictions on the extent of non-audit services that could be offered to audit clients. He even floated the idea of a 'pure audit firm' which did nothing but audit work for clients. He suggested that forcing integrated audit firms to leave the market for non-audit services, would open-up the market to new suppliers in much the same way the Glass-Steagall Banking Act of 1933 did. This indicates is that consulting emerged by exploiting spaces created by regulatory changes. Such changes were aimed at addressing problems associated with managing conflicts of interests across different professional groups. This led to periodic structural upheavals in the industry as certain types of pre-eminent suppliers of consulting services (e.g., large accounting firms) emerged as a dominant presence and then declined in response to changes in the regulatory system (Kipping 2002; McDougald and Greenwood 2012).

A second theme relates to knowledge diffusion. Consulting firms have been seen agents in disseminating managerial ideas and techniques between firms, sectors and nations (Kipping and Engwall 2002; Sahlin-Andersson and Engwall 2002). As these firms expanded from America into Europe and beyond, they introduced their proprietary methods into client organizations in new national markets. We will consider this point in greater detail when we discuss the contributions on the institutionalization/regulation of the industry in Part III of Volume 1. A final theme in this literature concerns the chimeral qualities of consulting. Consulting is a transient activity in that the methods, tools and techniques that underpin the design and delivery of its service changes over time (Kipping 2002). What the historical accounts emphasize is the acute sensitivity of consulting to the nature of client demand and that the knowledge base in consulting is not fixed. There is a churn of ideas which impacts on the structure of the industry over time. These themes are also evident in the contributions in Part IV on Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management and will be discussed in more detail below. We now turn to summarizing the contributions.

The contributions in this section begin with Matthias Kipping (2002)[v] who identifies the different phases that have characterized the development of management consulting over the twentieth century. He distinguishes three successive but overlapping phases: scientific management (1900-1980s), organization and strategy (1930s-) and IT-based networks (1960). These phases occurred as management consultancies sought to take advantage of the emergence of different managerial issues clients experience through the swift pace of change but also its implications for the management and employees. As client demand shifted significantly so did the composition of the industry. Kipping argues that in each phase different consulting firms came to prominence. Although such firms may remain successful after a particular phase peaks they are unable to maintain their leading position in succeeding phases. This arises because of the 'institutional establishment' of a firm's reputation (i.e., its association with a particular form of consulting) the skills of its consultants and leverage (ratio of junior to senior staff). Hence, consultancies are locked-into providing services associated with a particular wave. The paper argues that these three factors create virtually overwhelming barriers which mean that it is 'difficult for consultancies of one generation to retain their pre-eminence in the next wave' (p. 45).

Denis Saint-Martin (2000) provides a historical review of the development of the consulting industry in UK, Canada and France. Saint-Martin argues that the development of 'scientific management' created the early stimuli for the later development of more specialized business consulting practices. Demand for outside advice by clients relied on a number of key assumptions. In particular consultants were perceived as a resource for transferring specialized skills, knowledge, and expertise. Saint-Martin argues that the public sector played a key role in the industry's growth in each of the three countries. The public sector relied on consultants for initiating and justifying a number of significant changes associated with the emergence of New Public Management. Government use of consultants provided a healthy and large market for consulting services but also helped institutionalize the view of consultants as key agents of change. Consultants became increasingly influential as they gained greater access to the centres of government decision making. Some consultants moved into central government to occupy senior policy positions. The public sector perpetuated the idea that outside advice was necessary for organizational improvement. This apparent endorsement at the highest levels of government became a crucial factor in supporting the development of new market opportunities for consultants.

Whereas Saint-Martin examines the growth of the industry in relation to the external environment Christopher Wright (2000) studies the evolution of consultants in the context of the shifting trends in advice-offerings. He argues that early consulting firms concentrated on shop-floor workers but over time the focus shifted towards activities aimed at the management / executive level and 'all levels in between' (p. 103). In a similar argument to Saint-Martin, Wright proposes that the growth of consultants needs to be understood in terms of changes in the socio-economic context which shifted demand for their services. The emergence of new entrants (i.e., accountants and strategy firms) as well as the continuing ability of consultants to convince clients of their indispensability in new organizational arenas helped fuel demand. As the industry grew and diversified over the course of the twentieth century the nature of consulting services moved from a focus on labour and productivity, to corporate strategy, human resources and information technology.

A complimentary approach to explaining the growth of the industry is the study of the migration of consulting firms and their ideas and techniques between America and Europe. Matthias Kipping (1999) locates the emergence of management consulting in the development and popularity of scientific management. He provides a detailed exposition of how consulting firms like Beduax, who drew on Taylorism, made a significant contribution to the dissemination of business methods and techniques into Europe. Kipping argues that the initial international expansion of consulting firms, prior to the World War II, was facilitated by the standardization of the systems they promoted, and the use of existing American clients as a "bridge" for entry into foreign markets. Their first European clients were foreign operations of their existing American clients. According to Kipping the 'decision to hire a consultant relies almost exclusively on the reputation of the service provider and the establishment of a trust-based relationship between consultant and client' (p. 192). He therefore identifies the importance of consultancies forming linkages with local elites who acted as “connectors” into key business networks. At the outbreak of World War II the American consultancies exited the European market. This allowed local nationals to develop their own consultancies by either, buying/using the existing office or establishing spin-off consultancies. These consultancies came to dominate the European market until the emergence of strategy firms such as McKinsey in the 1960s, who offered a distinctively different form of consulting. Whilst some of these firms used similar procedures to enter European markets to those in the earlier phase of internationalization, Kipping notes that ‘They had to rely on different entry strategies than the first movers, including outright acquisitions, highly distinctive products, or the help of often so-called “rain-makers” or “door openers” who ... made the necessary introductions’ (p. 216). Apart from the American foundations of management consulting Kipping’s analysis highlights the importance of client relationships in underpinning the development of business in new markets, as well as projecting a high quality reputation to attract local clients. The success of these firms was based on ‘intellectual, reputation and relational capital’ (p. 193).

Christopher McKenna (1995) provides a different explanation and interpretation from those publications discussed so far. McKenna argues that the changes in regulative policies introduced in the United States, and in particular, the Glass-Steagall Banking Act in 1933, compelled the restructuring of the industry. The 1933 Act prohibited banks from engaging in consulting activities. This regulatory change supported the development of independent management consultancies as clients turned from ‘bankers to management engineers for organizational advice’ (p. 54). The Act therefore created a void that was filled by small management engineering firms who became independent consultants. McKenna’s arguments differ from other contributions in two respects. First, he suggests that the rapid growth of consulting was *not* anticipated or foreseen. It did not occur in a gentle developmental manner as assumed by Saint-Martin, Wright, and Kipping. Second, he argues against the view that the consultants' associated with scientific management were solely or mainly responsible for the industry's growth.

Part II - Perspectives on Management Consulting Work

The contributions in this section have been selected to represent two contrasting perspectives that have dominated the way consulting work has been interpreted namely the Organization Development and the Critical Perspective. The main themes and contributions in each approach are reviewed in the two sections that follow.

2.1 - The Organizational Development Perspective

The Organizational Development (OD) or 'functionalist' approach dominated the literature from the 1950s through to the 1980s. This argues that consultants are expert organizational actors who possess specific knowledge, skills, methods and tools that can make a direct and positive difference to client organizations. A key assumption in this literature is that consultants have specialist knowledge that equips them to solve a range of client problems. Written primarily by successful consultants many of whom were also academics, this literature assumes that consulting services are inherently valuable and will make a constructive contribution to clients (Lippitt and Lippitt 1986; Block 1999). This literature argues that consultants produce value by diffusing knowledge clients do not have, or it is expensive for them to produce internally (Armbrüster 2006; McKenna 2006). As Nachum (1999:923) argues 'professional knowledge is the [consultants'] core resource, and it is both the input and output in their production processes.' The consultants' value is partly based on their economies of scope where their specialization in particular areas becomes a transferable knowledge commodity (Armbrüster 2006). The literature also identifies the importance of structured intervention methodologies that anticipate the potential problems in an assignment and seek to manage these so as to maximize the effectiveness of the process. At the heart of the OD literature is the portrayal of the consultant as a professional helper who is drawing on an expert body of knowledge that clients inherently recognize and value. Overall, the contributions in this sub-section examine the different models of intervention, the process of intervention, the factors accounting for consulting success and the responsibilities and role of clients.

In one of the most influential pieces of writing on management consulting Edgar Schein (1988) identifies different models for thinking about how consultants interact with clients. Schein argues that most consulting interventions can be categorized into three broad types, which are: 1) a 'purchase of expertise' model in which clients compensate for internal deficiencies by acquiring specific expertise or knowledge from external agents, 2) a 'doctor-patient' model in which the client seeks help when they do not understand what the problem is, and 3) a 'process consultation' approach that is based on co-diagnosis of the causes of a problem and joint agreement on the feasibility of the solutions that are deemed appropriate. In this mode of intervention the consultant ensures that the client has the necessary skills to address the problem for when it reoccurs. Implicit within these models is the way that different forms of dependency and power dynamics are created between consultants and clients. However, Schein recognizes that each of the models is useful and identifying which model is appropriate for a specific situation remains a core challenge for both clients and consultants.

In this paper Edgar Schein (1990) discuses in greater depth the 'process consultation' model and why it might be the more appropriate method to use when consultants seek to provide advice to clients. He proposes that effective helping happens when the consultant engages with the client at a level that allows the client to articulate and realise the obstacles that hinder his/her decision making. Instead of suggesting what the individual should do the consultant is rather trying to understand the more nuanced cognitive and emotional processes by which the individual experiences the challenges faced. Instead of suggesting an ideal course of action the consultant is seeking to create transparency in the client's thinking, to offer alternative ways of looking at a problem and to assist the client to express the situation. According to Schein the consultant's important consulting accomplishment should be aimed at enabling the client to understand the best way to tackle and control the felt challenges. ''In process consultation, it is essential to create a situation in which *clients continue to own their own problem*; the consultant becomes a partners or a helper in diagnosing and dealing with those problems' (p.61 Italics in the original). This view challenges the way consultants have often been portrayed in the literature as assisting clients by conveying new information and knowledge. Helping the client tackle the challenges faced, becomes more important than suggesting courses for actions. According to Schein the consultant's efforts should be aimed at understanding the client's experience and *before* any consideration can be given for applying business models, methods and techniques.

What determines a consulting intervention as effective to clients? What is the difference behind a 'successful' and 'failed' intervention? What are the reasons that can account for such difference? Whereas Schein focused on identifying the principal approaches framing consulting interventions, David Kolb and Alan Frohman (1970) answer these questions by uncovering the more specific underpinnings for what makes consulting effective. They argue that the reason for clients' disappointment with consultants is the lack of clarity with which intentions are shared and roles are defined. It is not just the knowledge and advice that is important in the consultant-client relationship, but also, how the intervention itself is designed. Kolb and Frohman assume that the consultants' added-value is intertwined with the design and structure of interventions in relation to the wider organizational system within which the changes are situated, and the consultants' ability to build capacity within the client so that the client is able to 'solve similar problems' (p. 52). Thus, from their viewpoint, forms of intervention need to be seen from a holistic perspective in which consultants and clients understand their respective roles and work collaboratively and within a clearly structured assignment process. A core theme emerging from their paper is that the consultants' effectiveness is dependent on the design and continual joint monitoring of the intervention as it unfolds. The paper outlines a seven-stage intervention model (Scouting, Entry, Diagnosis, Planning, Action, Evaluation and Termination) that seeks to encourage continual dialogue between consultants and their clients to ensure mutual agreement over their respective roles, the nature of the diagnosis and proposed solutions.

Danielle Nees and Larry Greiner (1985) point out that the intangibility of consulting services means that clients are unable to know the added-value consultants offer prior to purchase and when having to choose between a plethora of potential suppliers. Clients are at risk of choosing the wrong consultant without possessing a robust understanding of what different consultancies offer and why they can meet their organisational needs. Engaging a consultant can be an expensive mistake since 'the cost of a mismatch between a client and a consultant may be far greater than the fees expended' (p. 69). They argue that key differences in the cultures and values of consulting firms mean that they 'are likely to perform in fundamentally different ways as they approach a client's problem' (p. 69). Consultants operate according to the style determined by their firm. The authors distinguish five types of consulting firms: Mental Adventurers, Strategic Navigators, Management Physicians, System Architects and Friendly Co-Pilots. Each type has a different focus and way of delivering advice with the consequence that they 'attack the *same* problem in a very different manner' (p. 77). The key point of the article is that clients need to be become better informed of the different consulting types so that they can match their needs with the particularities of what a consulting firm offers. They make a number of suggestions for ensuring a better fit between clients' problems and consultants' styles.

John Bessant and Howard Rush (1995) also examine the notion of 'consulting effectiveness' in the context of technology transfer. In a similar way to Kolb and Frohman, they stress the importance of adopting a holistic approach for understanding the client-consultant interaction. This approach does not only focus on the individual interaction between clients and consultants, but seeks to take into consideration other organisational factors, like the availability of resources, and the degree of commitment and coordination. Hence, the authors propose the need for a high level of client engagement with consultants, especially at the senior management level. They also argue that many firms, particularly SMEs, lack the managerial skills necessary to manage complex technology transfer projects. Consequently, 'there is a high incidence of failures or partial success in technology transfer, particularly amongst the SME population' (p. 100). From their viewpoint technology transfer does not simply involve the migration of new or different technology from the consultant into the client (the "linear approach"). It also involves a set of human-related dynamics that concern how individuals come to perceive the value of technology that lies outside the deployment of the technology itself but nevertheless influences the process of technology transfer. The article suggests that consultants may be capable organizational actors but their expertise does not automatically become a transferable resource that creates value within the client organization. To reduce the potential problems associated with the mismatch of experience, expectations and understandings, they argue for the importance of training prospective clients in the use of consultants. They emphasize the importance of open communication so that consultants can tailor their service to clients and meet their promises.

Why is it that some clients who work with consultants 'are constantly able to get what they want' and others 'somehow always seem disappointed in their advisers' (Tilles 1961:87)?

Seymour Tilles (1961) explores this question in relation to how clients work with consultants and emphasizes '*the way they* think about their relationship with a consultant' (p. 88). For Tilles, clients' frustrations with consultants derive from the failure to develop an appropriate relationship with consultants for the work undertaken. Tilles does not imply in the paper that consultants do not share part of the responsibility when it comes to failed assignments. However, the author questions whether clients effectively present their problem(s) to the consultants. He points out that clients are often 'seeking information, rather than help' (p.88), and assume that information can be easily converted into appropriate action. However, clients fail to participate in the diagnosis of the problem and the formulation and implementation of solutions. Building on this critique, this article argues that constructive client-consultant relationships arise from clients accepting their responsibilities. This is particularly so in relation to agreeing the nature of the outcome and the design of intervention processes, but also, monitoring the pace of the assignment and the changing roles within the client-consultant relationship.

2.2 - The Critical Perspective

In contrast to the OD Perspective, the Critical Perspective seeks to challenge assumptions regarding the consultants' expertise in transferring specialized knowledge. This perspective questions the essentialist approach to consulting knowledge and argues that it is highly ambiguous, contested and ephemeral. This literature emphasizes the uncertainty and churn in the consultants' knowledge-base. The value of consulting cannot be taken for granted because information asymmetries mean that clients are unable to ascertain the precise nature of a consultancy service prior to purchase (Clark 1993, 1995; Glückler and Armbrüster 2003). Moreover, because the transferability between consulting knowledge and the client's desired outcome is itself ambiguous and uncertain. This perspective stresses the importance of the need to create, legitimize, and sustain the value of knowledge claims in the eyes of clients and via the deployment of impression management and rhetorical strategies. As Fincham and Clark (2002:7) write, from this perspective 'references to effectiveness and success, and how these are determined and by whom, are seen as power games and rhetorical strategies employed by consultants to legitimize their knowledge claims'. The contributions in this sub-section examine the symbolic role of management consultants. In particular how consultants create uncertainty in clients to support demand for their services, the nature of consulting knowledge, the different and paradoxical discourses consultants deploy as well as their use of language and narrative.

We begin our presentation of this literature by making reference to the early work of Warner Woodworth and Reed Nelson (1979). At the time of this article's publication the discussion with regards to symbolism and consultancy was in its nascence. The focus was on the controlled application of behavioural scientific methods to ensure consultants achieved the business outcomes sought by clients. Although not specifically a critical article Woodworth and Nelson were perhaps the first authors to emphasize a) the symbolic role of management consultants and b) that the image of consultants as 'problem solvers' was subject to negotiation and could not be assumed. Indeed, they emphasize how the techniques and methods are used in order to "cure" problems in the client and the results are subject to interpretation. Their key point is that consultants 'serve much the same function many curing or healing rituals do "in primitive societies" ' (p. 18). By making a perhaps far-fetched comparison with shamans and other religious figures in traditional societies, Woodworth and Nelson stress how surface level differences hide similarities in the way both groups provide help and solve problems for clients. Both groups are outsiders. Their success is founded on their magical performances with clients based on solving problems through the application of methods and tools. Faith in the consultants' powers is partly driven by superstition. Superstition arises from client-felt uncertainties surrounding expected outcomes and also the deployment of mysterious techniques that are only known to the knowing few (i.e., consultants and shamans). In many cases, the long-term feasibility of consulting solutions remains subject to uncertainty and ambiguity, in the same way that religious rituals seem to provide solutions. Their interventions often lead to a cathartic release. Failure is not the result of the procedures but an outcome of the level of faith in what consultants are capable of accomplishing. The authors stress how consultants exercise power via rhetoric and impression management which became two principle themes in the later critical literature. Indeed, some authors built specifically on their analogy (Clark and Salaman, 1996).

According to Berit Ernst and Alfred Kieser (2002) the consulting industry's growth is based upon two complimentary dynamics. On the one hand 'managers' need to maintain control vis-à-vis the perception of an increasingly complex inner and outer environment' (p. 68) and 'consultants' seek to sustain their reputation as experts 'for the reconstitution of management control' (p. 69). They argue that clients become addicted to using consultants because they can never achieve the level of control they seek since the sources of their insecurity are ever-changing. This results from consultants introducing short-lived fashionable ideas which redefine the problems organizations need to address. As managers address each new problem however another one is identified that requires anew the assistance of consultants. According to authors clients use consultants because similar competitors and industry players use them, and not because the clients themselves have identified measurable outcomes from the consultants' intervention (see Clark 1993; Glückler and Armbrüster 2003). Ernst and Kieser argue that the industry's growth is the result of the shifting sources of uncertainty amongst clients and perpetuated by the consultants themselves. A key point in the paper is the consultants' instrumentality in persuading clients of the value of their service. They construct problems to be solved and then present themselves as an inevitable part of the solution. Thus, in order to understand clients' demand for consultants, Ernst and Kieser suggest that we first need to focus on the process by which perceptions of 'need' and 'value' come into being among clients and who creates these.

Whereas Ernst and Kieser argue that consultants persuade clients of the utility and value of their services, at a general level, Johan Berglund and Andreas Werr (2000) delve into this issue more deeply by examining the discourses consultants use when working with clients. Unlike a great many studies on management consultancy these authors base their argument and findings on actual observations of meetings between clients and consultants. The authors argue that in projecting an image of being knowledgeable consultants use two contrasting and even conflicting rhetorical strategies termed 'rational' and 'normative/pragmatic'. The rational approach is based on consultants possessing a stock of expert knowledge that can be transferred to a wide range of client contexts. In condensing this knowledge within commodified packages, consultants are able to inspire confidence in their clients by demonstrating the manageability of the problems experienced. This means that although a client might be concerned about the outcome of a project, the process of rationalization helps bring a sense of structure and confidence. Evidence of having the capacity to rationalize an ill defined problem becomes demonstrated through the range of analytical tools, methods and models consultants deploy. Berglund and Werr also argue that consultants draw upon a normative/pragmatic myth when they seek to enhance their image and reputation. This is done by emphasizing success stories with past clients that show-case both their experience and expertise. In this way they seek to stress their 'own and others' personal experience and merits, highlighting the fact that the knowledge needed for success is not some general, impersonal method but rather a specific, mainly tacit, ability to react to the contingencies of each situation' (p. 644). Berglund and Werr point out that although these two approaches are incompatible consultants actively mix them at the same time emphasizing the constructive use of models and experience. Hence, consultants legitimize their service by *synthesizing* both approaches. Mixing and shifting the two approaches allows consultants to place emphasis on those features of ‘expertise’ which are most relevant to that particular client. The article suggests that it is the constant adaptation and flexibility which underpins the effectiveness of consulting rhetoric.

How do consultants demonstrate the potential positive returns from the development and implementation of new forms of Information Technology (IT)? The dissemination of IT systems accounted for much of the growth of the consulting industry in the 1990s and 2000s. Brian Bloomfield and Ardha Danieli (1995) argue that consultants come to portray themselves as indispensable to clients by blurring and recombining the technical and social / political aspects of IT consulting through various discursive stratagems (i.e., being independent of IT suppliers, neutral intermediaries between clients and problems, as experts) that enable them to ‘speak for technology’ (p. 28). The authors suggest that what is a problem in a consulting assignment is not fixed and objective. Rather there are competing definitions and understandings of what is the ‘real problem’ (p. 32) the consultants are invited to address. This view challenges the consultants’ authority as the party which possess the advice and knowledge clients require. The article gives empirical examples of how, through their every day interactions with clients, consultants engage in an ongoing discursive struggle to exclude ‘rival views of problems and solutions’ (p. 40) and so define problems in particular ways which reinforce their identity and status. As with Berglund and Werr, Bloomfield and Danieli support the notion that consultants’ success is related to the ability to blend very different ‘discursive resources’, thereby overcoming potential challenges to their ideas and work. Such discursive resources concern the social interaction in which discussions over the organisational issue and the consultants’ solutions come to be established. The consultants’ ability to defend a position is subject to the nature of the conversations that influence the client’s understanding.

Keith Grint and Peter Case (1998) also demonstrate how consultants can be instrumental in marketing the added-value attributes of their service. The authors examine the case of Business Process Reengineering (BPR) which was a popular management fad in the 1990s. BPR was thought to help clients map out existing processes and identify ways to redesign processes in order to release greater amounts of efficiency. BPR came to be associated with removing management layers that were thought to hinder efficient decision making. Downsizing was believed to permit the reconfiguration of organizational structures, so that improvements in communication and decision making could be fostered. Whereas the restructuring of processes could help enhance levels of efficiency in the client, Grint and Case argue that BPR is exercised by consultants as a principle method for fostering improvement-making initiatives. The consultants' attractivenness is strengthened by their *potential* capacity to improve performance. Such improvement-initiatives are largely based on the exercise of language and rhetoric with the consequence that benefits and results are socially constructed. By making reference to the 'violent rhetoric of re-engineering' the authors stress the consultants' extensive manipulation of language. The rhetoric of *reengineering* allows consultants to make promises as to how efficiency could be released. However, the consultants' use of language seeks to accommodate the limitations of BPR's ambiguities and the consulting attributes which cannot be validated by clients. This means that expected outcomes that are thought to be 'achievable', remain subject to interpretations.

Mats Alvesson (1993) provides a critique of a number of assumptions associated with the accumulation, transfer and use of knowledge as a resource in professional service firms. Alvesson questions the functionalist view of knowledge prevalent in the OD literature as an objective entity that can be stored, manipulated, transferred and protected. He argues for a social constructionist view in which 'not only knowledge in itself is ambiguous but also that it is ambiguous what role this "factor" plays in most [knowledge-intensive firms (KIFs)]' (p.

1002). This is an important shift in emphasis from the consultants' possession of formal knowledge to their ongoing need to project their expertise to clients. As he writes, consultants need to possess 'knowledge about how to act in an "expert-like" way' (p. 1004). The successful deployment of rhetoric to construct and maintain images of quality, knowledgeability and professionalism through interactions with clients is central to consulting work. He suggests that 'Perhaps subjective orientations and person-bound talents ... are more significant than formal knowledge' (p. 1005). From this perspective management consultants are creators of impressions and manipulators of images that create beliefs about their qualities and so persuade clients that they have vital knowledge and can help.

Timothy Clark and Graeme Salaman (1998) build on the previous contributions' emphasis on communication and impression management. Focusing on the public presentations of management gurus, the authors argue that these consultants' communicative practices are based on telling powerful stories that define the nature and role of management. They write that 'gurus convey their expertise and construct the manager's role through language. In this way they do what managers do: they use language to help their clients understand, know, classify and therefore be able to act on the world' (p. 150). Their narratives are powerful because they constitute both 'the managers' values and skills; and the role, status and identity of senior managers' (p. 153). In this way management gurus define, celebrate, enhance and legitimize the nature and status of managers. Managers are portrayed as high status and heroic figures who are crucial to addressing the range of problems that beset modern organizations. In accepting the gurus' portrayal of the managers' role, managers also confirm the role of gurus as pre-eminent management thinkers. This article captures many of the central themes of the critical literature in that it emphasizes the social construction of consultants' knowledge, the ambiguity of their knowledge, the importance of language and rhetoric and the symbolic nature consulting outputs.

Part III – Industry Dynamics and the Management of Knowledge

The papers in this section consider a number of variables that impact on the competitive dynamics of the management consulting industry and the behaviour of firms who operate within it. They essentially build on the observation that the industry is characterized by low barriers to entry with the consequence that there is little restricting anyone becoming a consultant. Open entry into the industry supports a heterogeneous group of consulting service suppliers and fluidity in the composition of the industry. As we noted earlier in Part I the industry has undergone periodic restructuring, and in response to a) the emergence of new management models and techniques, b) changes in client demand and, c) changes in the industry's regulation.

The diversification of initially the large accounting firms and more recently the major IT suppliers into consulting services has partly accounted for its enormous growth over the past forty years. Consulting is attractive to firms who manage a portfolio of different advice-related services. In offering a *range* of services these firms are able to leverage their reputations in associated areas in order to generate potential additional revenues by cross-selling to existing clients. From the sellers' point of view this enables them to retain larger amounts of client business in terms of their lines of service offerings. For purchasers, using a single supplier may reduce information asymmetries since they apply a firm's reputation to different but related services. Suddaby and Greenwood (2001) have characterized this process as the expansion into new knowledge *jurisdictions* as these large multi-service firms seek to gain ever greater control over different knowledge bases. In the late 1990s, the large accounting firms offered auditing, tax, IT services, consulting (e.g. strategy, human resource, operations, reengineering, change management) and some even moved into building legal practices in certain countries. Byrnes (2007) gives the example of a large consulting project by Deloitte between 2005 and 2006. Following a spin off, Deloitte's client, Agilent

Technology wanted to split up. The client organization needed advice on the legal requirements of the company's restructuring, its internal structure and operations as well as its compliance with tax regulations. Byrnes (2007) points out that 'Deloitte was the main adviser on all three deals…Auditors advised on how to set up the initial-public-offering financials, consultants helped design the proper supply chain for a smaller Verigy, and tax strategists worked to lower the tax bill for the remaining Agilent business' (p. 66). This diversification may have enabled these firms to manage their exposure to declining revenues in their traditional audit business. However it also opened them up to accusations of conflicts of interest, and the possibility of instability arising from reputational damage from one stream of activity affecting other parts of the business. In this respect, leveraging a reputation across related services had both upsides and downsides, but the latter were not fully acknowledged until the aftershocks of the Enron scandal in 2001. This resulted in the Sarbannes-Oxley Act referred to earlier.

Our presentation of the papers in this section is divided between two themes. The first theme presents contributions with regards to the industry and the lack of regulation. The competition between consulting firms is largely subjected to creating conformity with business trends which happen to be in demand by clients. However the fluidity of the nature of the consumption of a consulting service itself also means that corporate reputation and personal affiliations with clients matter for how consultants are able to win and retain business contracts. The second theme focuses on the consulting firms' management of internal knowledge and learning capabilities. The contributions in this section underline the importance of innovation that emerges from formal and informal knowledge-sharing practices. Knowledge sharing allows consultants to share their experience about clients and also manipulate their learning from clients for improving their consulting services. The internal management of knowledge becomes a critical resource for understanding the deeper motivations by which consultants endeavour to win and retain clients. The manipulation of knowledge allows consultants to identify new opportunities and endeavour to satisfy clients.

3.1 – Institutionalization / Regulation of the Industry

The contributions in this section discuss the implications of such features as low barriers to entry, the nature of services, contractual/transactional uncertainty and the penetration of firms into different knowledge territories/jurisdictions. The first article seeks to identify the institutional factors that impinge on the activities of management consultancies and so determine the nature of their sources of competitive advantage. Drawing on a study of executive recruitment consultancies Timothy Clark (1993) stresses the role of information asymmetries between clients and suppliers. The intangibility of the service means that clients have difficulties determining the quality of a management consultancy service prior to purchase. This is exacerbated by the centrality of the interaction between clients and consultants which means that every assignment is unique and quality cannot be standardized. Client decision making with regard to purchasing services from an executive recruitment consultancy is further complicated by the ease of entry into the industry. This arises because consultants do not have to acquire proficiency in a formal body of knowledge, gain prescribed qualifications or be licensed by an over-arching professional body, in order to operate in the industry. The lack of formal barriers to entry permits a plethora of suppliers. In these circumstances Clark argues that information asymmetries exist between consultancies and their clients. Clients have difficulty in determine the quality of different consultancy's services prior to purchase. Consultants know more about the quality of their service than their client. Clients are therefore buying a promise of quality, the veracity of which can only be determined after purchase. This arises because the evaluation of the service is intimately linked to the nature of client-consultant interaction in that it is interactionally based. Clark argues that the most effective mechanism for overcoming information asymmetries is the generation of trust between consultants and their clients. This is based on close social ties which support the flow of information between clients about the quality of different suppliers. Thus, interaction with clients helps determine whether mutual expectations are met and, if so, supports positive evaluations from clients when novice users seek recommendations from more experienced users.

Johannes Glückler and Thomas Armbrüster (2003) build on the broad points that Clark highlights to emphasize the importance of institutional uncertainty arising from 'the lack of formal institutional standards' (p. 270) and transactional uncertainty arising from the nature of services. They argue that these sources of uncertainty have to be addressed in order for consulting providers to maintain their service offerings. In terms of institutional factors, consultants do not have access to a unique and esoteric knowledge-base that is unavailable to clients and other potential suppliers of management advisory services. Given that it is 'not a legally or institutionally protected profession' (p. 273) barriers to entry are low with the consequence that the industry is open to new firms and those migrating from related activities. Transactional uncertainty arises from the intangibility of the service which means that quality is difficult to ascertain prior to purchase, and that the service is co-produced with the consequence that it is often unclear who is responsible for the outcomes. Glückler and Armbrüster argue that the uncertainties and potential risks clients experience prior to contracting with consultants are alleviated through implicit, informal, and interpersonal practices that help generate *trust*. The most effective mechanism, they argue, for generating trust is 'networked reputation' which is based on valued third-party judgements of consultants. Thus, clients use their contacts to obtain a recommendation from trusted informants which 'conveys a far more personal and reliable credibility, since word-of-mouth discloses "thick information" about potential transaction partners' (p. 280). Personal networks and personal testimonies are used in order to gather information on potential suppliers. These are some of the mechanisms with which clients seek to reduce the degree of information asymmetry endemic to contracting with consultants.

The work by Royston Greenwood, Stan X. Li, Rajshree Prakash, and David L. Deephouse (2005) helps advance the discussion on this topic by examining the relationship between reputation and perceptions of PSFs' performance. Similarly to the previous two articles the authors argue that PSFs have to develop strong reputations because of information asymmetries between themselves and clients. A strong reputation enables consultancies to hire the best staff and 'charge premiums because of their "brand name"' (p. 663). They argue that PSFs either, seek to strengthen their reputations by building core areas of service (i.e., becoming a narrowly focused "boutique"), or via diversification (i.e., offering a range of related services across which it can transfer its reputation). Diversification contains higher levels of risk because of "reputational stickiness" (i.e., 'the difficulty of transferring reputation from one product or service to another' (p. 664). Greenwood et. al. find a positive relationship between the reputation and performance of PSFs. As they conclude, 'Reputation is vitally important to PSFs because it serves as a social signal to clients experiencing uncertainty arising from information asymmetries' (p. 670). The relationship between diversification and reputation was found to have a positive correlation but to a lesser extent. This observation arises from the fact that the success of a PSF's diversification strategy is dependent on 'how people *perceive* the legitimacy of a diversified portfolio' (p. 670, italics in the original). As the earlier articles on the history of management consultancy demonstrate, these perceptions change over time, which means that the extent to which firms can migrate into other services, fluctuates. They conclude that 'the notion of socially constructed markets is especially pertinent to professional service firms because of the pervasive importance of reputation' (p. 670).

Roy Suddaby and Royston Greenwood (2001) develop our understanding of the diversification of PSFs by examining the link between the 'knowledge commodification' process and 'jurisdictional migration'. By knowledge commodification they mean 'the process by which managerial knowledge is abstracted from context and reduced to a transparent and generic format that can be more easily leveraged within PSFs and sold in the market place' (p. 934). They argue that the communities of business schools, gurus, consultants, the large diversified Professional Service Firms (PSFs) and consumers all play a critical role in the production, commodification and consumption of management knowledge. They outline a four stage cycle of knowledge production. Although they acknowledge that 'events most likely occur contemporaneously' (p. 940) they elaborate on it as a sequential movement beginning with 'legitimation' by gurus, then 'commodification' by consultants, and 'colonization' by PSFs, and finally analysis and refinement by business schools through 'due diligence' checks on the soundness of the ideas. They point out that the very process of commodifying knowledge increases competition because it makes it more explicit and therefore imitable. Furthermore, the 'quickening pace of commodification' (p. 945) has led to greater entry into the consulting market as firms in related areas 'are looking to extend themselves to new professional jurisdictions' (p. 945). This is a process they name the 'colonization of knowledge'. Thus it is this constant search for new knowledge and new services to sell to clients in order to increase profits that has resulted in the entry of the large accounting and IT firms into the consulting market. This was facilitated by the low barriers to entry referred to in earlier articles in this section.

Finally, Kieser (2002) questions whether consultants and research-oriented academics (which he terms 'management science') can learn from one another. He portrays these two groups as separate systems with their own goals, norms and values. Management Science is concerned with producing publications aimed at other scientists so that they become cited by others in the field. Reputation is conferred on the basis of publications, citations, awards, the institution of work and so forth. In contrast the consultancy system is characterized by simplification, the avoidance of evaluation, meeting tacit client objectives and developing fashionable ideas. Kieser concludes ‘that consulting and management science research are very different social systems and because of the differences, the possibility of the two systems learning from one another is, contrary to accepted wisdom, extremely limited’ (p. 221). This article concludes that not only do consultants and academics operate in very different discursive and rhetorical realms, but so do academic and clients. Consequently, Kieser argues that without considerable changes in the way academics communicate to practitioners, which would be antithetical to their ‘rhetoric of science’, ‘the best strategy for business schools might be to decouple management science from consulting’ (p. 222). Kieser’s argument complements the position by Suddaby and Greenwood in that even though gurus, consultants and business schools contribute to the development of popular management ideas, the capacity and motivation of each of these actors to transfer ideas to the managerial audience, varies. Kieser argues that consultants may succeed where academic fail because of the nature of the systems in which they operate.

3.2 – Knowledge Sharing

The second group of articles in the subsection examine how the described above structural conditions impinge on how consultancies manage, organize and protect their core asset – knowledge. Even though management consultancies are influential developers and distributors of knowledge, knowledge has a double-edged quality. It represents a source of a consultancy’s competitive advantage but at the same time is difficult to protect since it does not simply reside in explicit methods and tools. It also dwells in the implicit judgements and experiences of individual consultants working from repeated interactions with clients (Werr and Stjernberg 2003). Whilst models and techniques can be protected and made proprietary, tacit knowledge, the knowledge that is made-up of experience and their unreflexive actions, is more difficult to protect. Indeed, as these articles demonstrate, this knowledge may provide individual consultants with important leverage over their firms when seeking promotion or an enhanced financial package. The contributions focus on how consultancies overcome these inherent difficulties in order to organize, distribute, and safeguard their knowledge through different knowledge management strategies.

Does knowledge-sharing contribute to the competitive advantage of a consulting firm? How do consulting firms share knowledge between their employees? Morton Hansen, Nitin Nohria and Thomas Tierney (1999) tackle these questions by looking at how consulting firms codify their knowledge into transferable tools and methods. The authors begin from the premise that knowledge can be understood in terms of its 'explicit' or 'tacit' nature. This distinction leads them to suggest that consultancies adopt a 'codification' or 'personalization' strategy for managing knowledge within consultancy firms. The former approach emphasizes explicit knowledge and the development of ways to codify, store and reuse knowledge. This activity is managed by using computer-based information systems which accumulate information that can be easily retrieved by other consultants looking for information on similar projects. A codification strategy supports the efficient transfer of information which may be beneficial when consultants are dealing with repetitive tasks (e.g. IT implementation). In contrast to codification, the personalization strategy stresses the *tacit* attributes of knowledge. Here knowledge is transferred by sharing personal experiences mainly through informal interaction between consultants, and at events designed to encourage dialogue. This knowledge development approach seems to be useful where the focus is on generating new knowledge instead of reusing existing knowledge.

A question that still remains unanswered, for when consultants seek to codify their knowledge so that it becomes readily transferable to others, is how can this information be used by other consultants? This question is answered by Morton Hansen and Martine Haas (2001) examining the codification and distribution of information between members of a large consulting firm via a knowledge database. The authors argue that 'Because attention is a scarce resource in an information-rich organization, organization subunits that wish to disseminate their information are likely to compete for this scarce resource (p. 2). The study identifies the suppliers' potential competing strategies for maximizing attention for their electronically disseminated documents and within an internally competitive market for knowledge. In this study, attention was measured by the number of times consultants accessed a document on the database. Hansen and Haas argue that in a market of multiple suppliers of similar information 'A supplier that pursues a publishing strategy of being highly selective and concentrated on a few topics provides benefits to users by conserving the time they have to spend sorting through documents' (p. 6). These suppliers are thus able to build distinctive reputations based on the narrow range of information they supply. Such reputations become a signal that foreshortens the search for relevant information and thus increases the number of times it is accessed.

Whereas the previous two publications examined the structural aspects of knowledge codification and dissemination, the next two publications examine the interpersonal dynamics between consultants and their firms. In particular, the factors that shape the consultants' willingness to communicate information and learning between them. Laura Empson (2001) examines the issue of why 'individuals resist knowledge transfer in the context of mergers between PSFs' (p. 844). She examines three cases of mergers between two accounting and four consulting firms. The case studies indicate that even though there was a strong emphasis on the importance of the transfer of knowledge it was actively resisted when individuals 'perceive fundamental differences in the form of the knowledge base and the organizational image of the combining firms' (p. 857). This arises, in part, because individuals involved in the mergers felt the need to protect knowledge that was personally valuable to them and would in turn support their promotion and career prospects (termed 'fear of exploitation'). Where consultants perceived differences in the respective standing of merging firms they were also reluctant to share client information (termed 'fear of contamination'). This study brings to the fore the significance of the socio-cultural context in which knowledge is embodied. This is a key factor in determining whether the processes alluded to by Hansen, Nohria and Tierney (1999) may work. The proposition is that for knowledge sharing to take place effectively there has to be a motivation to share, particularly in the case of 'personalization strategies'. Empson's study identifies the factors of personal interest and self-perception that may either hinder or foster such knowledge sharing.

In a complimentary article Timothy Morris (2001) explores why consultants feel the need to protect their knowledge as if it comprised their own intellectual property. Morris examines the case of a consulting firm that 'was going through a process of knowledge codification' (p. 823). He argues that knowledge codification practices derive from an aspiration to assert 'property rights' over the process of knowledge creation and transfer. The firm featured in this study developed a unified consulting model that was intended to guide the consultants' actions when developing solutions with clients. This approach aimed to standardize the know-how that consultants deployed in different client contexts by promoting consistency of across consultants in the firm. One problem identified with this approach is that it does not capture tacit knowledge (i.e., the experiences and styles of consultants). As Morris notes 'the firm aims to capture expertise in action in contexts that are not wholly predictable and then replicate it among other staff, even if they are less skilled and experienced' (p. 832). Another key limitation to codification is that consultants have a sense of ownership over the intellectual "property rights" (p. 822). Consultants feel proprietorial over their knowledge acquisition and relationships with clients. This is because the consultants' knowledge and client contacts underpin their identities at work, their career prospects and status in the firm. By trying to structure how consultants work, codification does not simply risk being ‘inconsistent with the prevailing beliefs about how consulting should take place’ (p. 834) (i.e., discretion and individual expertise) but also with people’s sense of what it is to be a consultant. The findings of Empson and Morris are complimentary in that they emphasize the personal factors that may block knowledge sharing strategies within consulting firms.

Part IV - Organizational Learning and Knowledge Management

The papers included in this section examine the theme of organizational learning and knowledge management. Both themes remain central to understanding how consultants and clients remain capable of generating and distributing learning and knowledge. According to Friedman (2003:400) ‘organizational learning is accomplished when individuals make their mental models explicit and mutually modify them to create shared organizational mental models’. Organizational learning comprises the human capacity and organizational structures by which information, experiences, and methods of working are embedded in an organization’s practices (Cyert and March, 1963). Knowledge management concerns the functions which allow the organization to tap into the skills and competencies of employees in order to innovate, diversify, and strengthen its existing operations (Spender 1994; Spender and Grant 1996). The papers in this section discuss a series of underlying assumptions about the consultants’ perceived role in developing competencies for generating learning within their own firms, but also, for transferring knowledge to clients. This section highlights two specific research themes. The first focuses on the *instrumental perspective* of learning and the second focuses on *management fashion*. At the heart of these publications is the critical question as to how consultants are able to generate and transfer learning and knowledge.

The instrumental perspective has been influenced by the work by Cyert and March (1963) and Argyris and Schön (1978). In this literature ‘learning’ is treated as an intangible resource that can be manipulated, enhanced, and developed according to the intentions of the organization and its members (Daft and Weick 1984). An organization’s capacity to learn is driven by the possibility of acquiring, translating, and actioning plans that can realize its growth potential. Such improvement-led initiatives enable the firm to improve decision-making practices as well as rectify mistakes by avoiding the replication of error. Levitt and March (1988) argue that ‘organizations are seen as learning by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour. The generic term “routines” includes the forms, rules, procedures, conventions, strategies, and technology around which organizations are constructed and through which they operate’. (p.320)

The instrumental perspective has been influential for how management consultants are perceived to have the competency to identify and intervene against the clients’ organizational problems/needs. It provides the basic ideology for accepting that learning remains an achievable but also transferable entity. This literature fostered the debate for how consultants create initiatives for enhancing their portfolio of services. Emphasis is placed on the consultants’ methods of taping into existing talent across members but also learning from working with clients (Avakian, 2004; Werr and Linnarsson, 2002). Championing ‘best practice’ remains subject to a firm’s efforts to create an environment that rewards achievement and performance. According to Lowendahl, Revang and Fosstenlokken (2001) consultants transfer and manipulate their learning from clients. This learning can result in improving their corporate reputation as well as winning new clients that experience similar business issues. Learning is perceived as internally directed and driven process. It remains subject to the individuals’ goals and intentions.

A complimentary literature focuses on *management fashions* as a vehicle for explaining how learning and knowledge develop. In this literature, the consultants' capacity for organizational learning is interpreted in light of already existing management ideas which have dominated managers' thinking over time (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2005). Examples are given in the literature of how Business Process Reengineering (BPR), Total Quality Management (TQM), Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and others ideas have become major consulting services. In this literature, organizational learning is not merely subjected to the intentions of the individual consulting firm. It is rather dependent on the latest way of thinking that lies *outside* consultants (Benders, van den Berg and van Bijsterveld, 1998). Management fads remain an invisible but yet powerful platform upon which consultants are able to construct and deliver advisory services.

4.1 Instrumental Perspectives on Learning

We begin our presentation of papers in this literature with an early but highly influential work on the topic by Chris Argyris (1976). Argyris examines how the learning process contributes to decision making practices that have implications for the organization and the individuals involved. He identifies two different learning processes: single- and double-loop. The former is a responsive learning process where individuals seek to detect and rectify when an error is occurring by taking corrective action. The latter approach takes place when the individual questions the underlying decision making processes that have lead to the specific outcomes. Argyris suggests that this approach asks 'questions about the fundamental aspects of the organization' (p. 367). He argues that in single-loop learning organizational actors make sense of the environment by supporting their decisions with information that is intertwined with a quest to maintain power and influence towards others. The misrepresentation of information, or the lack of effort to overcome personal interests results in ill-informed decisions. However, a double-loop approach to learning recognizes the importance of bias, the exercise of power and the tendency to avoid difficult situations. This approach takes a more holistic view of the organization as a social and political entity. Indeed, the process of challenging assumptions can be uncomfortable for some organizational members. However, Argyris argues that the effort to generate 'valid and useful information' (p. 369) results in a more open and candid atmosphere in which different views are explored and a more collaborative and transparent process of decision making emerges.

Whereas Argyris argues for the possibility and wider benefits of organizational learning, the operational processes by which such learning is achieved for consultants and clients requires further clarification. For example, what are the triggers which may influence the way consultants become innovative with respect to developing/expanding their service portfolio to clients? What are the required organizational structures that can foster learning between consultants? These are some of the questions that Narasimhan Anand, Heidi Gardner and Tim Morris (2007) seek to address in their paper. They argue that knowledge innovation begins from the consultants' personal aspiration for developing new/different marketable areas of services for clients. Such personal aspiration is linked with the consultants' endeavour for career progression in the firm. Anand, Gardner, and Morris argue that there are four core elements that need to be present if knowledge innovation is to occur. These are: a) socialized agency, b) differentiated expertise, c) defensible turf, and d) organizational support. In their model the individual consultants' career aspirations (i.e., *socialized agency*) become a significant *trigger* for initiating the desire to identify and develop learning and the creation of new services. This means that the presence of *socialized agency* is the vehicle by which new ideas emerge in the first instance. However, it is not enough for consultants to simply be creative in their initiatives. For new practice areas to emerge they also need to have the ability to persuade others in the firm of the potential value of their ideas to the business. They achieve this by developing products that are both distinctive, from what is currently offered, (*differentiated expertise*) and ‘creating *defensible turf* to persuade others of the relevance of their new practice areas to client markets’ (p. 411). Finally, consultants need to gain the support by other members in the organization in order to legitimize and embed the new knowledge-initiative (i.e., *organizational support*). According to the authors, consultants play an instrumental role in the development of new forms of organizational learning through the commodification of their own experience and the linking of this to the aspirations of the firm. The broader conclusion is that organizational learning becomes intertwined with the process of socialization. Personal influence is critical in ensuring new initiatives obtain justification by winning support by senior organizational members.

Whereas Anand et al. examine the processes of new practice creation within consultancies, Andreas Werr and Torbjörn Stjernberg (2003) focus on the ‘knowledge elements’ guiding the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge between consultants and clients. They argue that consultants draw on three ‘knowledge elements’: methods and tools, cases and experiences. Methods and tools provide structured ways of approaching a client problem. Past cases provide a source of information through which consultants are able to think about how to address a client issue which is similar to previously encountered situations. Such cases are often formally recorded and become accessible to consultants via knowledge management databases. However, Werr and Stejrnberg underline that it is the consultants’ personal *experience* which allows them to make their advice relevant to the client by adapting ‘both methods and cases to the characteristics of a specific project’ (p. 893). The use of methods and tools provides a formal body of knowledge that is codified and available to consultants prior to their intervention to clients. Such information helps shape the consultants’ approach to an assignment. In using their personal experience consultants are able to contextualize and apply their methods and tools to the clients’ specific context. The consultants’ *experience* represents the tacit knowledge that is responsible for ‘translating’ the codified and explicit knowledge ‘in terms of old cases and methods and tools to fit the specific situation that the consultant was currently working in’ (p. 895). According to the authors the use of experience is a significant factors determining how consultants adapt the use of tools in the client and thereby manage pressures to standardize their service.

The development of organizational learning is also examined by Ariane Antal and Camilla Krebsbach-Gnath (2001). The authors argue that clients learn from consultants when consultants play a marginal role in the decision making process of the client. They point out that it is often assumed that consultants need to be the primary party that leads the client into taking action. Such an assumption is based on the view that consultants possess superior knowledge and expertise than the clients. In contrast, Antal and Krebsbach-Gnath argue that the client’s process of learning becomes possible when the client takes a leading role in addressing his/her own organizational problems/issues. As they write ‘learning is treated as a participative experiential process that the consultant can facilitate for the client’ (p. 467). To be effective consultants need to play a marginal role by offering advice or a different perspective on how a situation is to be perceived and understood. The process of learning requires the client to play a leading role in generating tacit understanding of how to address problems/challenges outside of the consultants’ intervention. It is argued that the consultants’ role is effective when the client becomes responsible for his/her own learning experience. As they conclude ‘It is the commitment to the adoption of “marginal” roles by consultants and “central” roles by clients throughout the process that maximizes each’s contribution to organizational learning. The consultant cannot learn “for” the client’ (p. 479). This argument supports the argument advanced by Schein (1996) with reference to the different consulting approaches. The marginality identified by Antal and Krebsbach-Gnath shares a common thread with the *process consultation* approach where the client contributes equally to the identification of the issues that need to be addressed, as well as, to the design of the required response or/and solution. Clients need to learn how to solve problems themselves instead of relying on consultants for help.

According to Bogenrieder and Nooetboom (2004) organizational learning is facilitated when organizational members attach emphasis on their personal development, but when this is grounded on a *collective* understanding of progress. The close ties between professionals remain dependent on the channelling of information on best practices and methods of intervention. By using the *community of practice* as a metaphor for expanding on the micro-development of learning between groups the authors identify four key variables that can influence successes or failures in this process. These are a) knowledge and learning, b) structure and type of ties, c) potential relational risk, and d) governance. According to Bogenrieder and Nootboom knowledge sharing is underpinned by structural, intra-organizational and personal features that influence the development of knowledge at a collective level. The findings presented in this paper confirm the competitive and dynamic character of knowledge generation between consultants. Interpersonal interests, perceptions of risk and aspirations to personal development remain important structural variables that influence how consultants develop their partnerships with clients and produce their interventions.

James Chrisman and Ed McMullan (2004) argue that there is a causal relationship between the survival rate of new venture capitalists when such rates are evaluated against the use of external assistance and advice. They highlight that when new venture capitalists are using external help such collaboration provides an opportunity that goes beyond just acquiring new information. They write 'the value of outsider assistance primarily comes from the opportunity for knowledge generation that it provides to an entrepreneur in the context of a specific venturing decision' (p. 231). Outside assistance is argued to provide a platform of experience and knowledge that enables new ventures to identify risks and make informed decisions. The paper reports the results of a longitudinal study of a programme offered by the Small Business Development Centre (SBDC) in Pennsylvania. The authors found that the survival rate of new ventures increased because outside assistance provided a significant sense-making role and allowed the new ventures to better manage uncertainty. In particular, the process encouraged entrepreneurs to acquire 'a deeper appreciation of the strategic situation of their ventures and how to exploit the opportunities present in the environment' (p. 241). This paper affirms the view that knowledge represents a transferable resource that can be made available through access to external advisors.

4.1- Management Fashion

Stephen Barley and Gideon Kunda (1992) point out that a series of ideological approaches to management have dominated at different periods from 1870. They identify five distinct ideologies over this time: industrial betterment, scientific management, welfare capitalism/human relations, systems rationalism, organizational culture. Each approach focused on identifying those core business practices which were believed to improve the 'effectiveness' and 'productivity' of organizations at a particular time. Central to their argument is that each of these ideological discourses increased and then declined in popularity. The authors suggest that in the succession of the different ideologies there was 'an alternation between normative and rational ideologies' (p. 384). They write 'Rational rhetorics stress the efficient use of structures and technologies, while normative rhetorics stress employee relations' (p. 389). The paper suggests that each of these rhetorics was popular for around fifty years. These four eras are broadly linked to periods of economic expansion and contraction. A key finding is that rational ideologies come to the fore in periods of economic expansion and normative rhetorics are pre-eminent when economies contract. This paper emphasizes that management ideas rise and fall over time and contributes to our understanding of how management fashion occurs. The paper's relevance to management consulting is that it helps us understand how consultants need to develop their advisory practices so that they are in harmony with the management rhetorics that dominate at any particular time. This idea also suggests that the nature of consultancy models and techniques change in response to broader socio-economic developments.

Eric Abrahamson (1996) builds on the broad point that management ideas and techniques change over time to develop a theory of management fashion. He argues that theories of aesthetic fashion, such as clothing, are not appropriate to understanding ‘technical fashions’ such as those within the organization sphere (e.g. change management, knowledge management, Six Sigma). Critically, Abrahamson argues that a set of organizational actors engage in a continuing search to develop apparently novel management ideas that meet managers’ emergent needs. Management fashions are therefore defined as ‘the product of a management-fashion-setting *process* involving particular management fashion setters – organizations and individuals who dedicate themselves to producing and disseminating management knowledge’ (p.256 emphasis in the original). For Abrahamson consulting firms are part of a management knowledge arena among management gurus, business schools and management academics and publishers (see also Ernst and Kieser 2002). Similarly to Barley and Kunda (1992) Abrahamson argues that rational (i.e., 'efficient means to important ends’ (p. 255)) and progressive (i.e., ideas are considered by their audience as novel and leading-edge) norms influence how the audience accommodates popular management ideas. Fads championed by consulting firms and other knowledge entrepreneurs, become prominent when they first persuasively articulate what they consider to be the key organizational / managerial priorities at any point in time. Second, when they indicate the reasons for which their particular fads/solutions/technique offer the best means to address these priorities. The implication of this argument is that the legitimation of different knowledge service providers remains subject to capturing the ‘Zeitgeist’ or spirit of the times. When their solutions and techniques are perceived as being the most relevant and likely to meet the immediate and pressing concerns of the managerial audience, then the legitimacy of the consultants' is strengthened (see also Kieser 1997). This article suggests that the continuing prosperity of consulting firms is dependent upon their ability to produce ideas that are considered state-of-the-art and meet clients' ever shifting immediate needs.

Alfred Kieser (1997) offers an alternative approach to understanding management fashion. Building on a critique of Abrahamson's (1996) model he makes two key points. First, he questions whether there is need to differentiate between theories of technical fashions (i.e., management fashions) from aesthetic fashions (i.e., clothing) since Abrahamson 'still borrows all variables for the explanation of the size of demand for management fashions from theories of fashion in aesthetic forms' (Kieser 1997:54). Second, and building on his first point, he argues that 'rhetoric, which is the essence of management fashion, is an aesthetic form ... management fashion is explained by conceptualizing rhetoric as its main fabric' (pp. 54 and 56). Therefore, he concludes that theories of aesthetic fashion can be used to explain management / technical fashions. For Kieser management fashions are designed to be attractive to their intended audience and on the basis of specific attributes the audience is looking for. Whilst not conducting a detailed analysis of specific texts he uses the example of bestselling management books. He shows that generically such books contain a number of common ingredients like focusing on 'one factor', stressing the urgency for change, ensuring the key elements are 'linked to treasured values' (p. 58), the use of simple language, and so forth. These ideas conveyed in these books have to chime with the prevailing *zeitgeist* and improve the books' attractiveness to the management audience but also their saleability. Critically, he also argues that 'all these ingredients are useless if the timing is not perfect' (p. 61). Kieser also argues that in creating these apparently innovative ideas fashion producers are actually creating stories of mythical achievements. These are attractive to rationalist managers because they help quench deep psychological stresses caused by the uncertainties from operating in an increasingly competitive world. As he summarizes, ‘fashion performs the function of introducing order into a chaotic world’ (p. 63). Through following fashionable management ideas managers not only know which problems to tackle and how to approach them, but are able to do so knowing they are one of many followers of the fashion. Therefore they can escape any blame attached to their individual actions because they are following a community decision and not theirs. Finally he argues that consultants, and other suppliers of management fashions, operate in an ‘arena’ which perpetuates the fashion as they all ‘ride the wave’ and develop their own variants to sustain their own niche markets. Like Abrahamson (1996), Kieser (1997) highlights that management consultancies are key producers of fashionable ideas and need to sustain a position at the forefront of innovation if they are to survive from one wave to the next.

Whereas Abrahamson and Kieser develop an over-arching theory of management fashion John Gill and Sue Whittle (1992) examine the common structural elements in the evolution of three fashionable management ideas - Management by Objectives (MBO), Total Quality Management (TQM) and Organization Development (OD). They note that the popularity of these fads, converted into business package services, expand and contract as they evolve through a series of discrete stages: Birth, Adolescence, Maturity and Decline. The authors point out that these become attractive consulting-led packages to a managerial audience because of experiencing ‘managerial anxieties in rapidly changing and increasingly competitive times’ (p. 291). Managers feel threatened by a number of forces and so are attracted to the quick improvements promised by these ‘managerial panaceas’. They argue that the cycle of enthusiasm to disenchantment is inevitable given the difficulty in objectively evaluating the effectiveness of these packages. Since managers often do not know what they are purchasing 'The seeds of eventual disillusionment are accordingly sown at this stage when decisions are taken on inadequate data' (p. 291).

Whereas Gill and Whittle argue that a key feature of the pattern in the cycle of fashionable management ideas is the decline and replacement of each new idea, Chester Spell (2001) argues that management fads do not disappear completely. He writes 'although fashions are beliefs that increase and decrease in appeal, the decrease may coincide with the increase in attention given to the same fashion under another name' (p. 360). For the author, new and leading-edge fashionable ideas are often the re-presentation of *past* ideas. He also points out that the length of time associated with peer review in academic publishing means that the academic literature will tend to lag behind the general business press. Indeed, any reference to fashionable ideas may first appear in the business press. Spell examines citation counts in a selected group of academic journals and business publications between 1971 and 1998 for the following fashionable ideas - benchmarks, quality circles, pay for performance, and Management by Objectives (MBO). He argues that there is a close interrelationship between the evolving *life cycles* of different fads in that 'the substitution of one fashion for another is not necessarily a one-for-one process' (p. 370). Old ideas can continue to live-on in apparently new guises and packages. He also found that some fashions are initially diffused in the business press. Thus the paper confirms how fashionable ideas can emerge from a number of sources of which consultants are one and the ideas they promote are not necessarily a radical departure from earlier ideas. Indeed, the initial take-up of an idea may be related to its ability to draw on the momentum of and commitment to previous related ideas.

In contrast to Spell (2001), Paula Phillips Carson, Patricia Lanier, Kerry David Carson and Brandi Guidry (2000) examine a series of hypothesis in relation to 16 management fashions since the 1950s in order to ascertain how the character of fashionable ideas have changed over this period. There are six points underpinning their argument: (1) more recent fashionable ideas have higher peaks but shorter life-spans than those of earlier periods; (2) that those ideas which peak more quickly tend also to decline more rapidly; (3) more recent management fashions are more difficult to introduce, require greater input from senior management and are 'broader-based'; (4) 'contemporary fashions demand long-term commitment and persistence, but do not appear to be given the time necessary to ensure positive outcome' (p. 1153); (5) more recent fashions tend to be 'more product-oriented and less people-oriented' (p. 1153); and (6) people-oriented fashions tend to have longer life-spans. This paper reinforces the point made in earlier papers in this section, that popularity of management ideas ebbs and flows over time. However, it highlights that the extent of flux is increasing and therefore consulting firms have to become more adept at riding the waves of change.

In a further study on the life-cycle pattern of a single management fashion, Eric Abrahamson and Gregory Fairchild (1999) focus on Quality Circles. They seek to provide a theory that helps explain the triggers responsible for the variation in the life-cycle of fashionable management ideas. Such explanations focus on three dimensions, namely, 1) differences in when knowledge entrepreneurs 'begin, continue, and stop promoting management fashions' (p. 708), 2) whether previous ideas provide a supportive context for the emergence of new ideas or whether ideas emerge independently, and, 3) whether the discourse of the upswing is "emotionally charged" (p. 708) and that of downswing 'unemotional and qualified' (p. 708). Abrahamson and Fairchild underline the relatively *fluid* transience between successive management fashions and the 'exogenous' and 'endogenous' factors that contribute to their emergence and decline. They show that the life-cycle for quality circles is represented by a skewed bell-shaped curve (sudden surge followed by slower decline). Their findings also indicate that 'each of the new fashions resulted from collapse of demand for the previous fashion, and, therefore, the sharp decline in one fashion led to the sharp increase in the next fashion' (p. 723). In contrast to Spell (2001) they also found that the discourse about a fashion was positive during the period of growth. Finally, they identify three 'debunking strategies' during the downswing: debunking/rejection, surfing (moving to another idea or technique), and sustaining (continuing to advocate the idea or technique). What this suggests is that the level of attachment to a particular idea varies amongst the actors in the management-fashion-setting community. Some actors may therefore be more willing to support an idea for a longer period of time. The extent of commitment to an idea over its life-cycle and by different types of management consulting firms, is the focus of the next article

Robert David and David Strang (2006) investigate how different kinds of consulting firms join and then abandon a fashionable idea. They explore the case of Total Quality Management (TQM). Like other fashionable ideas, TQM displays a bell-shaped life-cycle curve. The authors argue that firms with 'related expertise' to a management fashion (i.e., 'human capital and organizational capabilities that are relevant to a market opportunity' (p. 219)) are likely to enter the market as the lifecycle progresses. These firms differ in terms of whether they are 'specialist' ('deep but narrow skill base' (p. 220) or 'generalists' ('possess a wide range of capabilities' (p. 220). Their empirical evidence supports that generalist consulting firms are quick to seize on market opportunities but have a surface-level understanding of how to implement a fashionable idea into a client. Generalist consulting firms entered the market and in large numbers during the upswing phase of TQM. In contrast, specialists predominated in the downswing as clients came to appreciate their deeper knowledge and focused expertise in implementing a fashionable idea. Their results show that for TQM the consulting market 'shifted from being a sector in which generalists were overrepresented to one in which specialists predominated' (p. 223). This study provides further support for the importance of 'focused reputation' (Greenwood et al. 2005). As clients become more knowledgeable and discerning over the course of a fashion cycle they increasingly seek firms whose 'related expertise' is more closely tied to the management fad. Generalists are able to swiftly transfer their reputations to new market opportunities as they arise, but the consultants' reputations as a 'Jack of all trades' means that clients perceive limitations to their expertise. A consulting firms' survivability in a market depends on shifts for who clients regard as legitimate suppliers of a service and over the life-cycle of an idea. The fluctuation between being 'generalist' and 'specialist' consultancies supports the notion that consulting markets are socially constructed.

Jos Benders and Kees Van Veen (2001) build on Abrahamson's (1996) article and introduce the notion of 'interpretive viability'. By this term they refer to '*a certain degree of ambiguity about a fashion's content*' (p. 33, italics in the original). An idea has a greater chance of success by appealing to a broader audience if '(potential) users can eclectically select those elements that appeal to them ... or opportunistically select as suitable for their purposes' (pp. 37-38). This argument suggests that an idea is not stable in terms of its conceptual scaffolding. Instead, its meaning remains subject to constant negotiation and reinterpretation by those who supply it and those who consume it. Thus, ideas can be transformed in their application by users because of their inherent ambiguity and multiple levels of interpretation. As it already has been argued by many contributors in this section labels may change over time but their components remain relatively similar. For example, even though BPR became highly influential as a label in the 1990s, in essence it drew upon key propositions that were already developed by the scientific approach to management (Taylor, 1911), where 'reason' and 'change' could help redesign processes and influence outcomes. This is sometimes referred to as "old wine in new bottles" because something can appear new when it is not. Relabelling enables consultants and other management-knowledge entrepreneurs to move fluidly in and out of fashions by representing what they are doing to make it appear more up-to-date and fashionable. Using the example of Business Process Re-engineering they conclude that what is included under the label of a particular fashion is not as specific as perhaps a precise acronym may imply. Life-cycle curves based on citations in academic journals and business media imply that fashionable ideas can sometimes decline rapidly from their peak in popularity. However, they can 'leave traces or "sediments"' (p. 48) as they are recombined into later ideas. Like Spell (2001) the authors conclude that 'there may be much more continuity in management practice than the transitory image' (p. 50) implied by a single term or label. Specific management ideas remain popular but in a different guise.

Part V - The Client-Consultant Relationship

Although the journalistic literature has generally approached the work of consultants from a critical perspective, it highlighted the critical importance of the client-consultant relationship. The publications in this section address these criticisms by developing detailed understandings of what is meant by the client-consultant relationship and its fragile and shifting power dynamics. These publications argue that the client-consultant relationship is not as unbalanced as it is often perceived. There are insecurities and uncertainties on *both* sides. As Fincham (1999, p. 343) points out 'the focus on the client-consultant relationship argues for a jointly constructed account and against any tendency towards closure or notions of the necessary ascendancy or dependency of one or other partner. The interactive focus means that the varied forms of the relation between consultant and client need to be kept in view'. The literature stresses notions of *mutual* benefit and interdependence and that he client-consultant relationship is not dominated by the influence exercised by a single party. As Tilles (1961) underlined on an early contribution, from the outset clients have responsibility to take an active rather than passive role by fundamentally thinking how to manage the relationship. He writes

> Too often the relationship is viewed as either an opportunity to buy the "right answer" or to have a high and expensive authority provide both the insightful diagnoses and the sure cure. On the other hand, executives who view an association with a consultant as a process to be managed are more likely to get what they want. (Tilles 1961, p. 99)

The client-consultant relationship is not simply subject to the dominant interests of one party only because both parties can alter its development depending on the nature of their input. Clients challenge consultants' advice and methods of intervention and in doing so alter the direction of an assignment (Sturdy, Clark, Fincham and Handley 2009). Clients use consultants for instrumental reasons such as approving their decisions and shifting the blame for unpopular decisions onto external agents (Nikolova and Devinney 2012). Regardless of the motivations for using consultants, success is not pre-determined but rather the outcome of the interaction and active involvement of both parties (Avakian, Clark and Roberts 2010). In studying the dynamics of the client-consultant relationship this section focuses on the social context of the relationship. This includes examining such factors as the exchange of information, the development of trust, dealing with conflict and decision making. The social context within which the relationship develops is important for understanding how both parties come to generate interpretations of their engagement as well as the overall value of the consultants' services when a project finishes (Avakian, 2004).

The literature in the subsection 'The Process and Roles of Intervention' examines the nature of the social space within which the relationship occurs. In particular, the respective roles of clients and consultants, the nature of these roles, and how interdependence and trust are created. Other issues also include the power-balance between clients and consultants, how interests are manifested, and whether consultant performance can be measured. The literature in the subsection 'The Consultant-Client Relationship in the Context of Competing Interests' focuses on the management of conflicts of interest, accountability, the economic pressures under which consultants work, the relative contribution of clients and consultants to the outcome of an assignment and their mutual insecurities. The publications in this section offer new perspectives for appreciating the interpersonal dynamics between clients and consultants. The occurrence of positive or negative changes in the course of the relationship remains subject to individual but also to collective conditions that need to be co-managed. For example, the exercise of control, influence and persuasion need to be seen as constructs that are co-dependent on the mutual interaction and input by both parties. The publications underline the degree to which the complexities of the client-consultant relationship have been underestimated and help indicate new areas for future research.

5.1 - The Process and Boundaries of Intervention

What happens when consultants and clients come together? How can this intangible and dynamic interaction be conceptualized? Barbara Czarniawska and Carmelo Mazza (2003) seek to address these questions by framing the consultant-client relationship as representing a 'liminal space'. This was a term originally developed by von Gennep (1909/1960) in relation to rites of passage which had three distinct phases 'separation (divestiture), transition (liminality) and incorporation investiture' (Czarniawska and Mazza, 2003:270). The liminal phase is a state of in-betweeness characterized by ambiguity, flux and transience. A key point in the article is that 'Consultants are not summoned to organizations to undergo the rites of passage, but to organize them. Their task is to temporarily turn a regular organization into a liminal one' (p. 279). The authors highlight the client-consultant interaction as representing a *social rite of passage* in which clients and consultants move in opposite directions. They write as 'one group marches out, the other marches in' (p. 283). According to the authors as the consultants start their work they are empowered and clients are disempowered. When the consultants present their recommendations clients are given back control of their future and consultants are near to leaving to a less certain future. As the client organization is taken through this transition, those involved lose control of their time, identities, priorities and much else. It is an uncomfortable space but the authors argue a necessary one in order to move an organization from one state to another.

Whereas Czarniawska and Mazza look at the broad structural framework of the client-consultant relationship other questions concern the way advice and knowledge transfer is constructed between the two parties. Management consultants are often perceived as the dominant party that offers information/advice that clients need. However, the consultants' internal knowledge development process remains an unaddressed issue.

Siw Fosstenløkken, Bente Løwendahl and Øivind Revang (2003) examine the internal knowledge development practices of two consulting firms working in engineering-design and communication consulting. The authors argue that despite the two firms' sector differences a striking similarity remains the importance of the consultants' responsibility for developing knowledge *through* client projects. Not only consultants were viewed as responsible for learning from clients but also expected to channel such learning back into their own firm. According to the authors, the consultants' learning occurs as a result of their direct interaction with clients and was aided by 'the level of competence of the client' (p. 869) as well as working in multi-disciplinary teams and participating in peer discussions. Greater stress placed on the consultatns' '*interpersonal aspects of knowledge development*' (p. 870) rather than the more formal aspects such as training courses. Given the stress on learning from clients the consultants developed 'interpersonal communication skills and the ability to understand different types of client expectations' (p. 872). Enabling junior consultants to access the best clients for learning opportunities is identified as critical for the consultants' individual knowledge development and personal career growth. On-the-job learning allows consultants to get recognition by their superiors and enjoy opportunities for promotion. This study also highlights that clients may also want to learn from consultants indicating that the intention to learn is not a one-way process.

The role of the client is also emphasized in the paper by Donald Hislop (2002). He makes the observation that consulting success is a dynamic outcome of the interaction and involvement of both parties. Examining the implementation of Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) within four consulting assignments, the paper shows how 'the use of pre-existing social relations to shape decisions' (p. 665) was stressed to encourage the development of trust and reduce uncertainty. Whilst the technological and processual elements of ERP's implementation may appear to predominate the role both parties play during their social interaction remains significant. Although not over-emphasizing their role the article focuses on how clients impact how an assignment unfolds. A key observation made in the paper is that even though the companies studied were geographically diverse, ERP's installation and the consultant-client interaction had core similarities in terms of how information was disseminated between the two parties. Moreover, the extent to which clients showed agreement or resistance to the consultants, and the way that consultants and clients collaborated with each other. Despite these broad similarities Hislop identifies a 'diversity of ways in which attitudes, perceptions and behaviour of staff from the client organizations shaped the nature of their consultancy relations' (p. 668). These differences relate to social and cultural variations in each of the client organizations which in turn influenced the degree to which the consultants tailored the ERP system to the clients' context. In those cases where clients retained greater strategic control over decision making they were able to attenuate the actions of the consultants. Overall, Hislop moves the empirical focus from consultants to clients and portrays them as active and influential agents in the consulting process.

Hislop's argument is expanded and supported by the earlier work of Chris McGivern (1983). McGivern places emphasis on the social facets of managing the consultant-client relationship.

The author stresses the importance of *interdependence* and that the balance in collaboration is dependent on the individual actions of the people involved. Clients and consultants retrospectively need to adjust to the actions of the other and ensure that play their part. According to McGivern the successful management of the relationship is founded on actively focusing on those social qualities that matter to the parties involved. For example, clients and consultants alike have concerns in relation to how changes are introduced, how communication flows between individuals and how agreement is reached. Drawing on three case studies, eight aspects of the relationship were identified as critical, but three were particularly important: '*need for trust*, *high levels of interaction* and *contingent methods*' (p. 382, italics in the original). This study emphasizes that each party is vulnerable in the sense that clients depend on the consultants to perform certain activities to achieve the agreed outcomes. Likewise the consultant needs the client to assist 'in defining the nature of the problem(s) at issue' (p. 368) and contribute to the work conducted to resolve them. McGivern argues that the success of a consulting assignment is not to be found in the factual qualities and objectivity of the information and knowledge flows. It needs to be found in the competencies for addressing the social aspects of the interaction that in turn help shape joint expectations and perceptions and support the emergence of mutual dependence.

The papers presented so far position the client-consultant 'relationship' at the heart of understanding the nature of advice generation and consumption. However, the word 'relationship' is discussed in a homogenous way with the consequence that there is a need to understand the more specific attributes that comprise its features. Jim Kitay and Christopher Wright (2003) tackle this issue by examining the different *types* of relationships consultants create with clients. Following a series of interviews with Australian management consulting firms, the authors provide a theoretical framework that helps explain the factors contributing to the economic as well as social underpinnings of the client-consultant relationship. Kitay and Wright argue that consultants take on multiple roles that lead to different types of relationships. In particular, consultants can work as Advisers, Partners, Providers, and Implementers. The ‘roles’ are dependent on the nature of the knowledge deployed and the nature of the boundaries between clients and consultants (i.e., a social vs contractual relationship). For example, in a contractual relationship consultants can be seen as Implementers where they help deliver against a set of formally agreed and prescribed goals. In a Partnership relationship consultants can develop more in depth and interpersonal attachments with specific individuals in client organizations. Given its social foundations, the removal of specific people that comprise the relationship could therefore hinder the delivery of a project, and regardless of the formally agreed and prescribed contract. The implication of this argument is that consultants sustain their relationship with clients when they are able to *affirm* the more specific features characterizing these roles. Kitay and Wright argue that the movement between roles is difficult because of structural impediments relating to the nature of relationships and knowledge. They conclude that in multi-service firms the full range of roles will exist and that some will be better suited for carrying out different service lines. For example, strategy consulting firms which offers the implementation of IT systems require the technical transfer of tools (i.e. Implementers) as well as advice on its relationship to the firm’s strategy (e.g. Advisers).

Stuart McDonald (2006) challenges the assumption that consultants are believed to be the dominant partner when working with clients. He argues that clients play an instrumental role in influencing how consultants design and deliver their service in the first place. Drawing on a series of interviews from four different client contexts, namely the Church of England, the UK’s Communication Workers’ Union, the Irish Airline Pilots’ Association and Poland, he argues that novice clients are calculative in how they manage consultants. Indeed, he suggests that novice clients ‘believe that management consultants are hired for the direct benefit of the organization, and they do their utmost to ensure that the consultants they hire provide this benefit' (p. 418). Clients can be calculative in the way that disclose information to consultants or present the problem so that they can influence the consultants' way of intervention. The paper suggests that it is a misconception to assume that clients do not challenge, provoke, question, or compel consultants to the point of changing their methods of working. McDonald's argument highlights the clients' capacity to alter the design and execution of consulting interventions thus 'extracting every ounce of benefit they can' (p. 417).

The complex relationship between clients and consultants brings us to the question of how can consultants' success be assessed? What are the appropriate measures to determine the consultants' performance? Guy Gable (1996) attempts to answer these questions by developing a model that seeks to evaluate performance. This model contains a series of key elements with regards to satisfaction and dissatisfaction and which help underpin how 'engagement success' can be operationalized. The author recognizes the challenge and ambiguity of measuring 'success' and resultant subjectivity of any assessment attempt. Nevertheless, the paper argues that there are three key dimensions that need to be considered when examining consulting performance. The first is the consultants' recommendations (e.g., are they accepted? is the client happy with them?). The second is the client's learning (e.g. is the client in a better position to solve similar problems in the future?). The third is the consultants' performance (is the project delivered on budget and on time? is the client satisfied?). Gable argues that the three dimensions are further underpinned by six dimensions of engagement success which are: a) recommendations acceptance, b) recommendations satisfaction, c) understanding improvement, d) understanding satisfaction, e) performance objective, and f) performance satisfaction. What determines the degree of success needs to be seen as a process over the lifecycle of an assignment and beyond. It begins prior to the engagement, continues during the interaction, and also follows after the consultants' exit from the project. According to Gable, efforts to measure a consultants' performance need to be made because this practice allows both parties to identify the actual *outcomes* of their interaction. Despite the inevitable subjectivity in evaluating performance Gable suggests that it helps elucidate the areas in which value is produced and in a mutually transparent way. A wider issue in this literature concerns the mismatch of expectations between a) what consultants believe they can deliver and b) what clients ultimately assume the consultants can produce. The relationship between 'expectations' and 'performance' remains important because it leads clients to making positive/negative judgements about the consultants' performance.

Fiona Czerniawska (1999) argues that the clients' expectations of consultants have grown dramatically over the last years. The clients hope that the introduction of business models and new knowledge can have a direct impact on performance. In the course of a consulting engagement, however, clients disclose a range of personal as well as organisational needs that are not formally captured in the contractual agreement and at the beginning of the relationship. The social dynamics of this relationship is comprised by the tendency for developing trust, affiliation, and dependence. This social context creates the disposition in clients to move away from what was initially agreed. Clients disclose new issues/needs that trigger the consultants' response in seeking to address them. The clients' unmanaged by yet disclosed felt needs and the consultants' confidence of intervention create an interplay of 'expectations' and 'solutions' as the two can be easily produced. The outcome of this interprelay remains difficult to evaluate but nevertheless embodies the client-consulting partnership. Czerniawska argues that the absence of clarity but also realism between a) the clients' expectations and b) the consultants' lack of reflection on their feasibility to produce results has contributed to the clients' growing dissatisfaction of consultants. The clients' aspirations of finding ways of improving their competitiveness are met with consultants that promise the world but do not deliver. Czerniawska argues that this cycle is intimately related with the management of expectations both clients and consultants generate but yet have to mutually manage.

5.2 - The Consultant-Client Relationship in the Context of Competing Interests

Don Moore, Philip Tetlock, Lloyd Tanlu and Max Bazerman (2006) explore the themes of 'independence' and 'objectivity' in the context of auditing services. This paper examines the extent to which it is possible to manage conflicts of interest between auditors and clients. Moore, et. al. suggest that a series of corporate scandals aptly demonstrate the difficulty in maintaining independence in accounting services so that auditors offer unbiased advice. They argue that 'Accounting firms have incentives to avoid providing negative audit opinions to the managers who hire them and pay their audit fees' (p.10). Corporate scandals indicate that the degree to which independent advice remains *intertwined* with conflicting as well as over-powering interests that have the capacity to alter how advice is produced and delivered. Moore, et. al. identify two particular mechanisms that undermine independence - 'moral seduction' and 'issue cycles'. Moral seduction refers to the processes that result in 'unconscious bias' (p. 16). As a consequence it represents a state in which individuals believe that they offer an unbiased view. However, this is done without being explicitly aware of the conflicts of interest which bias peoples' opinions in favour of the specific interests. As they write 'Conflicts of interest hinder people from making objective assessments, yet professionals often deny their decisions are biased by conflicts of interest' (p. 18). Issue-cycle theory refers to how institutions move through a series of stages to promote changes that favour a particular group's interests but are presented as helping to promote the wider good. Conflicting interests between groups as well as the egregious behaviour of organizations and the subsequent backlash builds opposition. This ultimately challenges the nature of the original changes introduced as well as exposes their associated private interests to greater critical scrutiny. A new agenda is promoted whose legitimacy is believed to be based on moral grounds but is rather sustained through the use of rhetoric and argumentation. The authors support the view that the qualities of auditor independence and objectivity are socially constructed. Independence cannot be viewed as if the elements of 'transparency' and 'bias' remain separate from private interests. According to the authors the debates concerning the auditors' independence need to be understood within the powerful exercise of self-interests which tend to promote bias.

Ulrich Hagenmeyer (2007) questions the extent to which consultants can be perceived as solely accountable for cases of manipulation over clients. He suggests that clients remain equally responsible for the design or delivery of consulting interventions. The author indicates that issues about ethics and accountability are more often attached to consultants than to clients because consultants are perceived as the party that can direct and trigger actions in clients. However, clients are also subject to the same ethical scrutiny like consultants because they exercise influence over the disclosure of information and influence the consultants' nature of intervention. This point brings the author to question how consultants and clients should strive towards developing a partnership that is underpinned by ethical behaviour. For Hagenmeyer a client-consulting engagement should be driven by a common understanding, transparency and mutual effort for achieving what is agreed, so that there is a 'clear distribution and transparency of responsibility ... the main ethical danger of every consulting situation: the diffusion of responsibility that ends up as a "responsibility switchyard" ... where nobody seems to be accountable for the results and effects of consulting' (p. 110). This 'underlying philosophy' provides a moral compass that ensures consultants avoid exploiting the clients' interests and 'examine whether the claims being asserted in a given consulting situation are justifiable in light of the common good' (p. 111). In order to avoid conflicts of interest there is need to understand the deeper principles that engender action in clients to ensure that consultants behave for the common good. By encouraging the development of consultants with integrity (i.e., 'see their clients as equals and regard consulting as a way to reinforce their clients' autonomy' (p. 112)) the article argues that they will 'arrive at independent judgements among the potential conflicts of interest they encounter in practice [and] ... identify ethically justifiable courses of action' (p. 112).

Monder Ram (1996) provides a micro examination of how individual interests and relationships influence consultants' relationships with clients. The paper discusses the case of a small professional service firm that grew rapidly by recruiting 'associates' who worked together within a flexible organizational culture. The culture allowed consultants to develop a 'highly individualized approach to client relationships' (p. 883) which supported the growth of the business. Permitting 'associates' to market themselves rather than the organization helped develop 'individual contacts, discretion, and high-trust relationships' (p. 884). Ram states 'it was hoped that the resulting "'autonomy" [of the consultants] would be used to secure sufficient "billable" days' (p. 886). However, a move towards a more corporate approach to marketing and relationship management threatened the autonomy that attracted people to work at the firm in the first place. The paper's argument is relevant to the findings by Kitay and Wright (2003) discussed in the previous section of this volume, in that it highlights the different types of relationships that develop between clients and consultants. It reinforces and extends their point that switching between different kinds of roles is difficult for clients and consultants. The authors underline the commitment and relationship ownership consultants feel towards clients. This argument parallels those in the section on 'Knowledge

Sharing' by highlighting further tensions in the relationship between individual and corporate interests.

Robin Fincham (1999) argues for a contingent approach to the client-consultant relationship by seeking to emphasize a more fluid and open conception of the client-consultant relationship. Fincham is critiquing those views, which he terms 'strategic' and 'structural', that tend to portray the client-consultant relationship as locked into a set of *a priori* dependencies that create an imbalance that tends to favour consultants. For him the balance of power is more fluid and the outcome is produced because of a range of contingent factors that come into play over the course of an assignment. Drawing on two case studies he concludes that 'What is being stressed here is the *range* of the client-consultant relationship and other possibilities which ... can include those of independent clients and consultant-client interdependency' (p. 347, italics in the original). The point is that the form of the relationship is not predetermined but emerges and changes over time. Ultimately Fincham views the use of consultants as an extension to the management division of labour in which the relationship can take a number of forms. He therefore concludes that the relationship is best conceived of as 'open-ended and structural symmetrical. The balance of power remains fairly equal, or it may be tipped one way or another by contingent factors' (p. 349).

Andreas Werr and Alexander Styhre (2003) investigate the main theoretical frameworks that influenced the study of the client-consultant relationship. The authors suggest that interpretations that seek to explain the structure of relationships clients and consultants develop are informed by two underpinning conceptions - the bureaucratic and the network organization. The authors suggest that it is possible for both approaches to exist simultaneously because organizations are not solely network oriented or strictly bureaucratic. As they write 'The first image depicts the client-consultant relationship as a partnership with a reciprocal power relationship between consultant and client. The second image depicts the relationship as an arm's length one, with the client in control' (pp. 52-53). The former image is very much in line with the critical literature whereas the latter reflects the OD/functionalist literature. These two discourses are referred to respectively as 'network' (enhancing the relationship) and 'bureaucratic' (distance and control). They explain the existence of these two contrasting and concurrent discourses/images as an outcome of managers' attempts at addressing a dual-control problem. The paper argues that 'On the one hand, they [clients] have to work with consultants in a way that supports the creation of organizational value; on the other hand, they have to protect and further their own value, position, and self-esteem' (p. 58). The former is an 'efficacy problem' whereas the latter is a 'legitimacy problem'. Thus the network discourse relates to value creation whereas the bureaucratic discourse infers control and management of the relationship. As they conclude 'while value creation in the client-consultant relationship was framed in relation to the network discourse, managerial legitimacy and identity were framed in relation to the bureaucratic discourse' (p. 61). This study reinforces Fincham's (1999) point that the relationship is fluid and characterized by a range of conflicting possibilities.

Andrew Sturdy (1997) questions the one-sided nature of vulnerability often attached to clients. He argues that in the client-consultant relationship clients have been portrayed as being passive, vulnerable and receptive to consultants' ideas. In contrast, consultants are portrayed as confident, in command, and both exacerbating and profiting from the uncertainties experienced by clients. The empirical evidence presented in the article indicates that rather than willingly accepting consultant recommendations clients often resist because of the threats consultants pose to 'managers' identities, jobs and careers' (p. 404). However, importantly Sturdy shows that these uncertainties are experienced by both parties in that consultants 'do not simply manipulate managerial insecurities, but experience similar anxieties derived in part from relationships with clients and their own labour process' (p.

405). Whilst consultants try to anticipate these, they are under considerable pressure to perform, satisfy clients, and, sell further services (‘sell on’) at considerable personal and career cost. Consulting firms are vulnerable to poor reviews of their work which may impact negatively on their reputation and so effect whether clients purchase their services in the future. Like Fincham (1999), Werr and Styhre (2003), Sturdy is arguing for a more dynamic and balanced view of the client-consultant relationship. One that recognizes mutual insecurities and pressures, and leads to a more nuanced understanding of the micro-practices and existential factors that create, sustain, undermine and rebuild control by both parties.

Susan Meriläinen, Janne Tienari, Robyn Thomas and Annette Davies (2006) explore how perceptions of consulting identity are produced between consultants when talking about their work. The authors focus on gendered discourses ‘which in turn shape the particular form that expressions of gender take in their talk on work and career’ (p. 540). Discourse refers to the uses of language that help project accounts of meaning. Such accounts create a social reality that reinforce notions of what it is to be a professional that in turn ‘construct what it means to be an “ideal” consultant’ (p. 541). The paper draws on a series of interviews with management consultants from Finnish and British multinational firms. The authors found that in the discourses produced by the interviewees, the construction of the professional identity was closely aligned to perceptions of gender. The ideal consultant was believed to exhibit particular features that support maleness and masculine attributes which mean that the discourse is ‘imbued with instrumentalism, careerism and the language of success’ (p. 551). Although there were some differences in the nature of the discourse between Finland and Britain the overall structural similarities in the gendered nature of the talk were similar. The authors conclude that the construction of the professional self in both national contexts was ‘embedded in a discourse of competitive masculinity ... The most salient meanings attached to professional identity within this discourse are work addiction and self-assertion’ (p. 557).

The paper's argument has practical implications for how the consulting relationship is underpinned by the creation of stereotypes concerning gender, power and influence. For example, in order for female consultants to appear persuasive towards clients they may feel the need to display masculine attributes (e.g. thrusting, aggressive, autonomous). Moreover, the paper highlights how culture can be a significant factor influencing how consultants think and talk about their role. The expansion of consulting firms into different countries brings to the fore the importance of local culture, the differing perceptions over male and female identity as well as the Western masculine attributes attached the 'ideal consultant'.

Finally, Brian Bloomfield and Ardha Best (1992) examine the nature of power during the development and implementation of an IT system. Drawing on the 'sociology of translation' the authors argue for the need to distinguish between the implementation of technology with the socio-political dynamics of the client-consultant relationship. As they write 'the concept of translation refers to the processes, methods or strategems through which actors attempt to enrol each other within a network (an actor-network)' (p. 541). They examine the process of translation in the context of discourses which allow clients and consultants to create a subjective reality for how they need to act. Conversations enable consultants to position their future contribution to the client. Moreover, how they view the nature of organizations and critically how they establish their position so that they are seen as essential for solving certain kinds of problems. Second, they show how a series of linked translations during the course of a particular project were designed to ensure that problems were defined in a way that was determined by the consultants. Hence, the consultants closed down alternative ways of viewing the problems at hand reinforcing the centrality and pre-eminence of their knowledge, skills and role. They conclude that 'the definition of an organization's problem, together with the proposed solution, is an exercise of power which takes place through the medium of various translations' (p. 555). It is via these process that IT consultants seek to 'to speak for problems, to represent and define them and thus to win acceptance for particular solutions' (p. 542) and thus bolster their position in the client-consultant relationship.

CONCLUSION

In this Introduction we have briefly summarized the key factors underpinning the rising interest in the activities of management consultants. We have suggested that the rapid expansion of the industry, debate about the use, value and cost of consultants, as well as their role as purveyors of knowledge have motivated different groups (e.g. journalists, academics, practitioners) to examine their work. Such interest has helped increase the consultants' public exposure, creating new questions about their methods of working and clients' advisory needs. In the latter part of the chapter we outlined the organizing structure for the contributions in the following two volumes and the broad themes they cover. Whilst much insightful and novel work has been conducted over the past forty years with the consequence that our understanding of consulting work has developed significantly, gaps in our knowledge remain. The literature on the client-consultant relationship emphasizes the interdependent nature of the relationship but the focus of most to research has been on the consultant rather than the interaction between the two or the clients' viewpoint. Difficulties of access relating to confidentiality have meant that few researchers have studied the client-consultant relationship as it occurs. Whilst recognizing this serious practical difficulty in gaining access to observe clients and consultants working together, some settings, perhaps because of the need for public accountability, are more open than others (Sturdy, Clark, Fincham and Handley, 2009). Being able to observe and record the direct interaction of consultants and clients would expand our understanding of the micro dynamics of this relationship by revealing the way they constitute themselves and one another in situ on an ongoing basis and how this aids or hinders knowledge flow. Without this kind of work we have little sense of the unfolding dynamics of the client-consultant relationship.

Examining the clients' perspective is critical because as Fincham (2012:79) has suggested 'Such an approach explores questions of shared agency between client and consultants, and queries assumptions about consultancy's ability to create dependency and its role as a powerful diffuser of new management ideas'. But as Schein (1997) has pointed out, the notion of a client is not necessarily homogeneous. A conception of who is the client extends beyond the people who purchase and directly manage the relationship. Clients are all the actors who are involved in contributing to an assignment whether such involvement is direct or indirect. What is currently needed in the literature is research that understands how the client system is organized and how different elements contribute separately and together to the ongoing achievement of an assignment. Furthermore, how different arrangements may impact on the eventual outcomes and their evaluation. Developing greater insight in this area would lead to a more balanced picture of the client-consultant relationship and help address some of the questions around the clients' capacities to manage consultants.

An additional area for research related to this issue stems from the observation that both academic and journalistic commentators have a tendency to focus on client organizations who are large in size. These range from multi-national corporations, to major private sector organizations, central government departments, state agencies and non-governmental organizations. With a few exceptions, small and medium sized enterprises, small charities, and small voluntary organizations have not been examined in any detail (Ram 1999; Macdonald 2006). Authors have therefore developed models and assumptions in relation to the purchase and management of consultants which may not be generalizable. The great majority of consultancies are small with thousands of sole practitioners operating as consultants (MCA, 2010). Looking at the work of these consultants will lead to richer and more nuanced understandings of the operation of reputation, networks, knowledge management and knowledge flows as well as project work and expertise.

Finally, and building on the previous point, there is currently little understanding of how consultants work in *cross-cultural* settings. Whilst accounts of the historical development of consulting acknowledge that it has spread from the U.S and U.K. to other nations, there is little appreciation of the operation of consultancies as multi-national firms, or of the cross-cultural management of the client-consultant relationship. Rather, consultants and consulting models and techniques tend to be seen as homogenizing influences that have continuously and successfully overcome national differences. Given the lack of micro studies of the client-consultant relationship and particularly in transnational contexts there is little appreciation of the extent of cultural adaptation or resistance to consultant-led programmes (for exceptions see Boussebaa 2009; Frenkel and Shenhav 2012). A fruitful avenue for future work would be to link studies of consulting directly to the broader literature on the cross-national transfer of management practices (e.g., Guillén 1994; Djelic 1998). Such exploration will lead to a clearer understanding of the role of different agents in the promotion and implementation of ideas across national boundaries. These studies could help determine the relative roles of different advice givers and contextual factors that either promote or limit their role. It could help ascertain the extent to which ideas are suffused with local knowledge so that solutions reflect different cultural systems.

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NOTES

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[i] A small number of those publications selected could not be published since we were unable to obtain copyright permission.

[ii] The definitions that describe the nature of management consultants do not capture the internal work of consultants (see Sturdy and Wright, 2011)

[iii] According to its website this database contains 'detailed records on over 86,000 newspapers, magazines, journals, periodicals, directories, and radio, television and cable stations and systems'.

[iv] One study of 1,224 U.S. companies reported that that non-audit fees paid to auditors were 2.5 times the size of audit fees (Morgenson 2002).